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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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* Illustrations by C. Sivaramamurti.
† ,, ,, A. K. Sekar.

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The Whispering Gallery of Life & Letters

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—
COLERIDGE

It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the *incarnation* of our thoughts.—
WORDSWORTH

Mr Ford Madox Ford

IN the preface dedicatory to his book, *It Was the Nightingale* (Heinemann, 10s. 6 d.), Mr Ford writes thus: 'They say every man has it in him to write one good book. . . . For the man's one good book will be his autobiography . . . . I have written reminiscences of which the main features were found in the lives of other people, and in which, as well as I could, I obscured myself. . . . I have tried then to write a novel, drawing my material from my own literary age.' It is indeed a novel, and a very enjoyable one too, that Mr Ford has given us, drawing his material from his own literary age; but there is no continuity in the incidents, no order in the grouping of them. The tale, like a tarantula, dances and flits about from one place and period to another with such unrhythmic rapidity that we lose our bearings in its bewildering flight. A writer crosses every page: from Moore, Galsworthy, Bennett, Cunninghame Graham, and H. G. Wells to those contributors of his own *transatlantic review*, issued from Paris—D. H. Lawrence, Norman Douglas, Ezra Pound, and H. M. Tomlinson. There are glimpses of Gertrude Stein, of A. E. Coppard, of James Joyce and many more; and behind these Mr Ford himself 'remains hardly less vague a figure than he has always been to English readers since the great days of the *English Review* when his name was Hueffer' and he was revered as an editor of genius.

This, about Mr A. E. Coppard, is particularly interesting:—

'I don't know what made Mr Coppard come and stay with me . . . Or perhaps I do. My old friend the——*Review* under a new editorship was pursuing the very admirable policy of preserving in what it published a reasonable balance between creative and what is called "serious" writing. I bought it one day at a bookstall, and came upon a piece of work that made me at once see that a new force existed in England. It was a story by Mr Coppard relating how,

when he was nearly starving, he had bought some bananas. I had never till then heard of Mr Coppard. . . . Then I saw other stories by that writer, and I became convinced that England possessed a short story writer as great as any there ever had been. Of that opinion I remain.

And about his meeting him:—

'Mr Coppard came. I had taken him from his writings, to be Irish or Welsh, but he was neither and with his exquisite perception of form, he could not be English like myself. So I formed in my mind the conviction that he must be a gypsy and that conviction gained immensely when I met him dark, lean, hard in physique as in intellect, and with piercing dark eyes under a deep hat brim, sitting on beech logs and giving out all the wisdom of an ancient and cruel world.'

Yes, it is all the wisdom of an ancient and cruel world—for long he had nothing but raw, grated carrots to eat—that Mr Coppard expresses in such incomparable collections of short stories as *Dunky Fitlow*, *The Field of Mustard*, *Fishmonger's Fiddle*, and *Black Dog*.

Similarly, in delightful anecdotal vein, Mr Ford speaks of Galsworthy backing a swindler, of Conrad, dreadfully pressed for money, selling some manuscripts of his to a bidder who had offered very large sums, not real manuscripts, but passages he had copied out by hand.

'It was the nightingale and
not the lark,
Which pierced the fearful hollow
of thine ear,—

quotes Mr Ford in the title page of his book; with W. E. Henley who sings:

'The nightingale has a lyre of gold,
The lark's is a clarion call,'

we can say that Mr Ford has played on a lyre of gold; he has witten such melodic prose from beginning to end; and as a sumptuous record of the colourful life of an artist who talks about himself by talking generously about his fellow-artists *It Was the Nightingale* is bound to remain one of the most interesting autobiographies of modern times.

Sir Henry Dickens, K. C.

IN *The Recollections of Sir Henry Dickens, K. C.* (Heinemann, 18s.), whose publication its author did not live to see, are hitherto unrevealed glimpses of Charles Dickens (Sir Henry was the youngest but two of the novelist's ten children), for example, the picture of a Christmas night at Gadshill—the last Christmas of Dickens's life—the description of a walking match arranged during his visit to Baltimore, and other incidents which show the great man in the little world of laughter and light he created for himself.

On a hot summer night, Sir Henry describes, when they were all sitting in the hall, with door and windows open, a bat flew in and fluttering about for a time ensconced itself in a recess in the ceiling. 'Something had to be done . . . to dislodge it. It was then that my father came to the rescue. He called for the library ladder and a stick and advanced to the attack. Suddenly it struck him that his head was uncovered and he had misgivings lest the bat might get mixed up with his hair. No adequate protection being at hand, he called for a *hip-bath*—of all unlikely things! With this protection on his head, like a new kind of helmet, he put his foot upon the ladder, and began to climb, but the bath, being but an unstable headpiece, began to wobble; as he mounted it wobbled still more and more until the contest reduced itself into one not between him and the bat, but between the bath and himself. It was at this critical time that the ridiculous side of the situation suddenly struck him and he at once became convulsed with laughter, until at last the bath fell down with a crash, and my father fell back on the floor quite overcome.'

Here is a letter, very short, very delightful, with the inimitable Dickens touch, written to Sir John Bennett, jeweller and clockmaker:—

MY DEAR SIR,

Since my hall clock was sent to your establishment to be cleaned it has gone (as indeed it always has) perfectly well, but has struck the hours with

great reluctance, and, after enduring internal agonies of a most distressing nature, it has now ceased striking altogether.

Though a happy release for the clock, this is not convenient to the household. If you can send down a confidential person with whom the clock can confer, I think it may have something on its works that it would be glad to make a clean breast of.

Higham by Rochester, Kent. Faithfully yours, CHARLES DICKENS.

About his father's books Sir Henry has not very much to say. Regarding *Edwin Drood*, the last of Dickens's novels and unfinished (Dickens died in the middle of his work, his pen stopping its labours in the midst of a syllable), he believes he knows how the story was to end but does not tell us. Who murdered young Edwin will be an eternal mystery. (Hollywood is picturising the story and its solution of the problem is awaited with interest. This is by the way.)

Sir Henry was Common Serjeant of the City of London for fifteen years and received his knighthood in 1922. His dearest hope was to become a Judge of the High Court. But the chance never came. 'It was a bit of hard luck,' he gently says.

The Recollections, apart from the new glimpses of the famous novelist, is a pleasant book which records a long life devoted to Bar and Bench, the story of a very human man of law, with a great sense of humour. Here smells spice, here shines radium.

Katherine Mansfield

ONE of the most remarkable short story writers of this century, the renown of Katherine Mansfield's work is rapidly becoming universal. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* by R. E. Mantz and J. Middleton Murry (Constable & Company Ltd., 10s.), the publishers declare, is the sole authorised biography of Katherine Mansfield. 'Miss Mantz who spent several months in New Zealand writing her book was given every facility in her work both by the family of Katherine Mansfield and her literary executor and has been able to make full use of unpublished journals and other new material. Mr Middleton Murry has co-operated with Miss Mantz in the writing of the book and has contributed an introduction and a concluding chapter in which he outlines his first meeting with Katherine Mansfield and their subsequent friendship which are necessarily of an intimate and revealing character.'

Most of Katherine Mansfield's stories assembled in such beautiful volumes as *The Dove's Nest*, *The Garden Party*, *Bliss*, etc., have her own country, New Zealand, for setting; they express a mood by means of a severe limitation: "everything has its shadow." The influence of Tchehov on her is evident; but her colonial birth and lack of local root, as Mr Graham Greene says, were difficulties in her way of naturalising the Russian artist. She had a rich and lucid mind but often she allowed her emotions to flood over the brink of her stories and draggle them heavily. 'Compared to Lawrence's,' writes Mr Murry, 'Katherine's achievement was tiny indeed; yet there is in it a quality which eluded Lawrence till the end.' Mr Murry is simply suggesting that Lawrence was a genius while Katherine was not. Katherine Mansfield wrote charmingly and without any profundity. Lawrence, like a wild flower pushing its way up through thorns and brambles and envelopingleaves, strove towards light and more light; Katherine was content to lie like a creeper curled in the shadow of the light. But hers was a courageous soul, though fragile; and the volume is an exquisite monument to her, fashioned by the tender hands of Miss Mantz, aided in her labour by the skilful lapidary, Mr John Middleton Murry.

Mr G. K. Chettur and Oxford

TO those Indians who have not visited Oxford a countryman's impressions of that city must be authentic and highly interesting. *The Last*

Enchantment: Recollections of Oxford, by G. K. Chettur (The B. M. Bookshop, Mangalore, Rs. 5.), with its most English title and beautiful poet's prose, reads like a novel; and reading it, one falls into a mood of dreaming in the "city of dreaming spires".

'An Indian's impressions of Oxford,' writes Mr Osbert Burdett about the book in *The London Mercury* for July 1934, 'excite our curiosity, and Mr Chettur's have one surprise: it is difficult to believe that a foreigner could have written them. The very title of his book is one that a young Englishman might have chosen; there is no trace of the foreigner in his style; and he appears to have had a thorough English education before he arrived in Oxford. He was up from 1919—21, and met there Mr Yeats, Mr Arthur Symons, and Tagore, and the impression left by his book is that such Indians find Oxford very much as Englishmen do. The book, therefore, will chiefly interest his compatriots who have missed his experience, but it is pleasant to learn that an Indian can slip into Oxford with the ease and pleasure that Mr Chettur records.'

We hope to write something more about the book in a subsequent number of the Journal.

Theme for Tusitala

A CHANCE visit to an old bookshop in Ealing when on furlough last year (according to a report in the *Star of India*), has put into the hands of an Assam planter, Mr T. Hill, what is believed to be a map of Cocos Island, where treasures valued at £ 12,000,000 are believed to lie hidden.

Mr Hill found the chart in a tattered old navigation book which he bought from a second hand bookstall in Ealing. He showed it to friends in England, who were sceptical of its value. Later, he showed it to the chief officer of an Atlantic liner who told Mr Hill that the chart was the key to a place in Cocos Island where treasures lie hidden. In New York, Mr Hill consulted a friend who told him the treasure was the loot by an English Captain named Thompson, who in the 16th century, was asked during a revolution in Spain to take the treasures of a cathedral to a given destination. The treacherous captain took the treasures on board his vessel, sailed to Cocos Island, stuffed the whole lot in a mighty cave and left them there.

It is stated Mr Hill did not receive much support in England or the United States to embark on an enterprise to recover these treasures. Mr Hill now proposes to raise funds by the creation of a limited company to buy a ship and fit her out on a treasure expedition, sailing from Calcutta. (*The Hindu, August 15, 1934.*)

The hunt for buried treasures is terribly exciting; it often begins with the unravelling of a mystery; more often, moves to a mirage; oftener still, marches to midsummer madness. Mother Earth's bosom seems to teem with pirate's plundered riches. Exit Captain Kidd, enter Captain Thompson. I wish that Mr Hill reads Poe, or R. L. S., or Le Blanc before he sets out on his excavating enterprise.

Mr Julian Hawthorne

MR Julian Hawthorne, the only son Nathaniel Hawthorne, the famous American novelist, died recently in San Francisco. A hydrographic engineer by profession, he displayed a talent for writing; and losing his situation he devoted himself entirely to literature. Some of the collections of his short stories are *Sebastian Strome*, *Fool of Nature*, *Dust*, and *Noble Blood*; and novels, *Bressant* and *Garth*. He also published a life of his father and mother. He was eighty-eight when he died.

Congress of Authors

RECENTLY an international congress of authors was held at Moscow. Among the most renowned who met were: Anderson Nexo (Denmark), Maxim Gorki (Russia), the President of the Congress, Heinrich Mann, expelled from Germany, Romain Rolland (France), Leon Feuchtwanger, expelled from Germany, Henry Barbusse (France), Upton Sinclair (America), and Overland (Norway).

RENUNCIATION

By KRISHNA R. GURUSWAMI REDDIAR

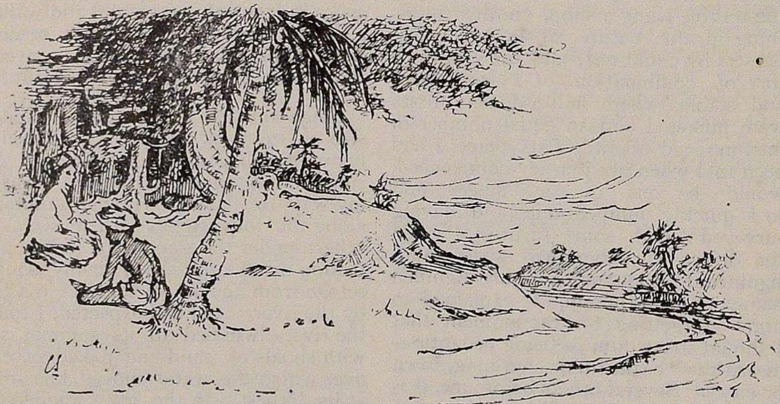
'HO, hooa—chewoo—chewoo'—thus the jutkawallah addressed the tired but restless pair of horses as he pulled up the reins; and the regular jolting of the jutka having suddenly stopped, I awoke from my much interrupted slumber. The good fellow told me that we had arrived at Singarapuram "sdation", and his lips parted smiling to the volume of the swollen word. Peeping out I found that the station consisted of nothing but a cluster of banyan trees and three huts; one of these three being a shop, another something in the nature of an inn where passers-by could rest, and the third, a sort of combination of a workhouse and stable, where half-a-dozen horses were picketed and an equal number of men mooned about. This place, I had been told when my journey commenced, would be one of the stages and so I quickly jumped out, and having surveyed it with some surprise, I asked the driver why they had given so insignificant a spot such a highly-dignified name. Singarapuram, I explained to him — forgetting for the moment that I should strike him as being pedantic—meant the "beautiful or charming, town or city". Several others before me, it is certain, had been equally inquisitive as to this, and so, accepting my method of interpreting the name with unfeigned indifference, he answered that "it", referring, of course, to the name Singarapuram, did not belong to the "sdation"—he was proud of his English—but to a village about a mile away in the direction of which he stretched his whip-hand, while assuring me that if I would only take the trouble to visit the place, there was little doubt that I would be quite convinced as to the suitability of the name.

To judge by the position of the blazing sun overhead (I possessed no watch), it was about noon, and knowing full well that it would be unwise in the highest degree to travel any further for some time, till the heat abated a little, I made up my mind to spend a few hours there. The jutkawallah having politely informed me that I could find him in the "sdabull"—he *would* speak English—marched towards the workhouse-stable combination, whistling a vulgar tune. I retired into the inn and refreshing myself as best I could with the provisions I had, rested a little. Then thoroughly tired of looking at the walls and roofs of that rickety structure, and the uplifted shafts of the jutka in front of it, I got out and walked towards the village. When I reached there it was not long before I discovered that it *did* deserve the name—Beautiful.

Singarapuram is a hamlet of modest size on the bank of a river, wrapped in luxuriant foliage near the main road that runs from Mathurai to Palani. I was on my way to Palani. Having sauntered along the four streets (there were no other), under the somewhat feeble protection of my umbrella, I finally sought refuge from the fire of the sun in a *tope* by the river. As I had expected, I found the river dwindled to its summer size with shoals of sand and naked pebbles over which the water moved knee-high at its deepest. In the *tope* wandered a faint breeze cool and refreshing, and the rustling of palms was as pleasant to the ear as was the fragrance of mango trees in bloom to the sense of smell; and the melodious notes of various tropical birds mingled in merry concert lulled me to a state of dreamy drowsiness.

Only a few minutes had passed when I heard someone walking towards me from a corner of the *tope*, the steady rise and fall of feet treading on the dried leaves that had fallen in heaps from the trees. The sound came nearer and nearer and opening my eyes I beheld an old peasant. His simple dress which was thick with dust showed that he had been through his morning's routine of work, and some bits of tobac-

co hanging on to the sides of his turban and one or two undetected ears of corn in the folds of his loincloth spoke clearly of the nature of his labour. In one hand he held a *thar*-stick such as farmers carry when ploughing or tending cattle and in the other he had some cords that they tie round the bulls' horns. Though looking tired there was in his hardened countenance an attractive expression of boldness and candour. The peasant after a cursory glance at me greeted me: 'I see you are a stranger to the village, Sir. I welcome you, Sir.' I replied in terms suitable to return a greeting so courteous and kind, and invited him to sit beside



'We fell to talking.'

me for a while if he had nothing urgent to attend to. He readily assented and his manner suggested his great good willingness to help, the little he could, strangers who came to the village. We fell to talking; he was eager to know where I came from, where I was going, and on what mission bound. (Meanwhile he had brought out his wallet of betel and nuts and offered it to me). When he learnt that I was on my way to Palani chiefly with the object of a visit to the Temple he became deeply interested and said, 'Is that so, Sir? Then, if you go to the Temple in Palani you will see our boy; and please, Sir, do not forget to tell him that you saw me here.'

'But you have not told me anything about your boy: where he is, who he is, and what he is. How am I to know him or find him?' I asked surprised.

'Oh yes, yes,' he agreed. 'I have not told you, Sir, but I will, with your permission. He is my brother's son. He is quite a boy or rather he is quite a young man now, and what do you think, Sir, he is? He is a *samiyar*, a *sanyasi* as the educated people say. He is now in Thevar Matam, just next to the Temple at the foot of the rock on the east side. So please do not forget, Sir.'

'But you haven't told me his name,' I reminded him.

'That's so. His name is Subban. But I do not know what they call him there, Sir. These *samiyars* have all sorts of names and some of them have no names at all. And what a funny thing, I never enquired about it when I was there. But sure, you will find him.'

I assured him I would make every effort to meet his boy and tell him all about our meeting and the old peasant looked pleased like a child. My inquisitiveness increasing, I wanted to know more about Subban and

questioned him what it was that had made a *sanyasi* of Subban. He replied that he would only be too glad to tell but it was rather a long story and if I would care to . . . I would not only care to . . . I would be most delighted to listen to whatever he had to say, I assured him.

'He left us (the old peasant began), let me see — he half-closed his eyes to have a clear memory and counted on his fingers—with the month of *Vaigasi* it will be five years since he left us. We were two brothers—I and my elder brother, a little older to myself. We grew up together, got married in the proper age and I must say, for my part, I have had a very happy life. By God's grace I have three children — two sons — they are all now married and are happy. My brother had two children, this Subban and a girl who is now married and is with her husband. Some ten years ago, my brother's wife—such a gentle, noble soul she was—died and not fully three years had passed when my brother himself passed away; and perhaps you noticed, Sir, from the road, a graveyard not far away to the east. They lie there now, my brother and his wife, side by side. When my brother died our Subban was about eighteen. And a year after his father's death Subban began to talk of getting married. And every evening after work he would talk and talk of this and nothing but this. How he would adore his wife, how he would clothe her in the nicest of clothes and deck her with the brightest of jewels, and similar silly things. You know, Sir, when once these young men get the wiving idea into their heads they will never get it out till they are face to face—' (here he broke of smiling) and resumed: 'When he went to Karur with his parents on the invitation of some of our relations to a festival he took a fancy to a girl there and it was a terribly strong fancy, this. My wife and I tried our best to dissuade him from marrying a town girl. We told him in the plainest terms possible that some trouble would come out of town-connections and advised him to marry a girl of our own kind. No, he would not listen to us. Who listens to old folk? We went to Karur to ask the girl's people if they would consent to the marriage. At first they seemed very reluctant but gradually gave in; we had to stop our work here for five full days and waste our time there in trying to get these townspeople's consent. We had to do it, Sir, because Subban was mad over the girl and there was no one else to do anything for him, and townspeople can be so rough.

'The terms of the marriage were soon settled and the marriage took place in Karur. We had to do everything the bride's people wanted us to do; they thought so highly of themselves. We wouldn't have had to spend half so much if Subban had only taken a country girl. But it all happened, Sir, and the townspeople talk and behave so funnily that (though it is a bad thing to say) I confess I was glad to get back home and breathe the pure village air.

'When the bride came to us it was not long before Subban made arrangements to set up a separate house for himself and his wife. This was done without much difficulty, as my brother and I had owned two huts between us and Subban had his fair share of the family property. The young pair seemed happy together for some time; but the trouble was, the girl did not know anything much. She could neither reap nor sow; she always wanted to wear bright and attractive dresses and Subban, poor boy, had to spend all the little money he earned by hard work. Yet he never said a word and what was more, he was touchy if anyone talked of her extravagant ways. Some months passed, and then the girl began to complain that it was very dull in the village and that the village-folk were all such queer ones to her. Subban had to follow her whithersoever she led him and he had to spend from what he had inherited in order to satisfy her, but all this he did with such an astonishingly pleased air about him that it seemed to us he cared for nothing in this life but to please his wife. Svarnam they called her—quite a town name, Sir. And Svarnam was soon un-

disguisedly and perfectly weary of what she called "every-day-the-same-and dull" life of the village. She and her husband then began planning for excitement; they decided to open a little shop near the road--where the jutkas stop, you must have seen it, Sir, it is one of those three huts, Sir, where travellers halt awhile. Well, they had to sell their cow to buy things for the shop — plantains, cocoanuts, betel leaves, nuts, tobacco, beedies, matches, and other articles for sale. Subban thought that that way Svarnam could get a ltittle of the town atmosphere —from travellers—the atmosphere that she pined for so much. She seemed pleased with everything and life ran on smoothly for some time. She would close down the shop in the evening and come to the village in time to cook the meals and then go back again there in the morning after seeing her husband off to the farm.

'But I felt that things were not all right. I cannot understand the ways of the townspeople, Sir. Something began to be whispered about; whispers soon rose into loud talk. Subban was very sensitive and few ventured to tell him anything direcly, but Time had his way and the poor boy himself told me one day that there was something queer in Svarnam's behaviour and that he couldn't make it out. And he made this remark almost every day to me, troubled and very sad. I grew anxious but what could we, poor folk, do, Sir?

'One Monday evening he returned from the farm and found the hut empty. No wife, no food, not even signs of cooking! He went to the road to see if she was still in the shop. No, she was not there either. The shop was closed and dark. In utter despair he came to us and told us what had happened and we suspected foul play. It was a shock to us all. He cried and with him we too cried, and our bitter lamentations helped us little. The night passed; Subban was in agony; he did not sleep a wink; he walked to and fro; he went to the shop three or four times during the night and returned with tears in his eyes and woke me up crying: 'Oh, God! She is gone; she is gone from me.' The day dawned and no Svarnam. The villagers came to know of the incident and they said: "We told you so. We told you so. She was such a hussy; we never liked her blouses and bodices and things, and we know she was free with every young fellow that came to her shop. We told you so." Subban was mute with grief; he could not bear the taunts of the people and so went and hid himself in his hut. Two days after, I learnt from a jutkawallah on the road that he had seen Svarnam, "the girl in the shop", in Palani, living with a hawker, a native of Palani who used to travel that road, selling his wares—combs, mirrors, soaps, ribbons, trinkets and things. The whole affair was clear. Svarnam had run away with the hawker perhaps because she was fascinated by his bright wares and thought she could have plenty of them, or because she was quite tired of village life and the ways of the village people, or perhaps had in a moment of weakness yielded to the seductions of the jolly fellow who talked of his travels, his love for her, and the splendour she could have with him, splendour and sin.

'When Subban heard this he said not a word but shook his head sadly. The next day he woke me up very early in the morning and said he was going to Palani. What for? I asked. Why, of course, to bring Svarnam back. Surely she would come back. At first I thought it would be a useless journey to make, but he was quite determined about it and his determination made me think that he would succeed in his endeavour. I offered to go with him, but he thought it the better course for him to go alone, for she might feel shy if I was with him and might not come back, he said, poor Subban. Accordinly he set off to Palani, and we had no news of him for a week. Then on a Friday evening just when I was entering my hut after work in the fields and wondering what had happened to Subban, I heard someone sobbing behind me. I turned round and found it was he, all covered with the dust of the road. Where

is she? I asked with hope, but alas! he could say nothing, and with great difficulty I got it out of him that he had failed in his attempts. Not only that he couldn't see the hawker himself, who, he thought, was deliberately keeping out of his way, but that the girl in the presence of some other townsfolk had actually laughed at the style of his turban. I had never felt so sad in all my long life as I felt that day with Subban by my side. My wife soon appeared on the scene; she burst into tears and we all wept like children. Days passed by cheerlessly for us, and Subban in the grips of an insidious fever was slowly losing strength. He would lie on the cot in our hut looking at people wistfully, sadly. No one could tell what was in his mind. Often he would call upon God in a tired, feeble voice, but he never for once mentioned his wife's name. After a long time, of painful anxiety and hope alternating, he seemed to be getting better. Soon he gained strength enough to walk about and wander through the fields but the will to work had completely left him.

'Suddenly one day he disappeared and there was no trace of him anywhere in the village or the suburbs. We had terrible fears; we thought he had killed himself; but it occurred to me that he might have gone again to Palani to continue his pleadings to Svarnam. So accompanied by one of my sons I went to Palani and found my way to where the girl lived. She jeered at us and dismissed us curtly telling us that she knew nothing about Subban or anyone of that name and that we had no business to be bothering her. Sick of hearts and diminished much we left her, and when we were thinking of returning home we quite accidentally passed by the Thevar Matam I told you about, Sir, —next to the Temple on the east side of the rock—and to our great surprise, there he was, Subban turned into a *samiyar*, his hair unkempt, with a beard growing and with little of clothing on him, his body grey with the sacred ashes. He recognised us and received us, but with an extraordinary restraint and indifference to whatever happened. My son and I persuaded him to come back with us to the village.

'She would stand at a distance and look at him.'

We indeed found ourselves, I confess, very much at a disadvantage ; his arguments as far as they went, were to us poor folk quite ununderstandable ; what did he care for this or for that ? what did it matter whether this thing happened or that thing happened ? He quoted the wise sayings of the saints and sung devotional songs. We wondered where and how he had learnt all these. And when we asked him what we were to do with his property he replied carelessly, " Oh, do what you like. It's all dust."

' We have seen him several times since, on our visits to the Temple. There was a surprising piece of news for me when I met him last. He told me in quite a disinterested manner that Svarnam had come to him several times, but she dared not approach him. She would stand at a little distance holding to a tree for support and look at him. Once she had brought some flowers for his *puja* and left them near the tree. Another time she had wept when she was about to leave the place. . .

' Well, Sir, that is how our boy Subban is now in Thevar Matam in Palani, a *samiyar*. You will not forget to see him and tell him that you talked to me here, will you, Sir ? Everyone in this world must work out his fate. Who escapes Fate ? ' He ended his narration with this sad question.

It was now past early afternoon and time for me to start. My friend, the peasant, accompained me as far as the village where he showed me Subban's hut which I examined with a sort of religious respect. While in the hut I asked him what they had done with the shop by the road, telling him I had seen a shop there.

' Oh, ' he said, ' we left the shop to take care of itself after distributing the few things that were there among the villagers. None of us in the village ever liked to go near it. For a long time it remained in a half-ruined state. Then a certain philanthropic person from Mathurai who passed by, thought that someone who was very poor might make use of it, and came to me to buy the place. I told him that anyone who cared to take it might have it free. Then he sent a poor widow from Mathurai with a little money to reopen the shop and she has come and settled down there.'

One of the first things I did in Palani was to go to Thevar Matam to see Subban. There he was sitting under a tree, his body grey with the sacred ashes, his eyes half-closed in meditation. I waited for him to take notice of my presence but it was long before I could get him to do so. I then told him of my meeting with his uncle which news he received with quiet unconcern. His passive self-absorption seemed to have swallowed up every active interest that he once had. And when I got him to speak at last he said, his voice trembling with emotion: " Yes, my uncle— he is a good man and kind and . . . all the people are good and kind. It was all my folly. To have mistaken the unreal for the real, to have thought illusion to be solid reality — it was my folly to have considered what are but transient appearances to be the Permanence. All is Maya. Brahmam is the only Permanence, the One Reality, the One Value. And I am thankful, oh God, that I see this, that I am now on my way to realisation of Life, by the renunciation of life." And he sang me a song from *Thevaram*, the meaning and melody of which enraptured and overwhelmed my soul.

On my way back from Palani I alighted at Singarapuram in the morning and met the old peasant. When I told him that I had seen and talked to Subban Samiyar, he was immensely delighted and deluged me with questions about his nephew. I answered all and he expressed his gratitude for what I had done. He came with me as far as the posting station to see me off.

The horses trotted, the wheels rattled, and with a strange pleasure I kept looking at the old peasant till in the distance I could see him no more through the chasing clouds of the road-dust ; and then the image of the *samiyar* came to me again, the *samiyar* that had once been simple peasant Subban of Singarapuram.

UNCANDLED LIVES

By " RACONTEUR "

AMORPHOUSLY the road ran and like a reprobate, vivid with foul fish offal, onion peelings, and other varieties of refuse thrown out of the tenement-houses, tea shops, and provision stores. There was only one tap in its torture of two furlongs and a half. The day was Friday; the hour about five o' clock in the evening; and around the tap it was a veritable riot of dusky dames and slender lassies, some with brass vessels and some with earthen jugs, and everyone of them eager to catch water first. Rain had fallen early in the afternoon churning the dust of of the road into oozing slime, and quaking the eternal slime about the tap into a slushy slough which state doubled the difficulty of catching water. As one woman fixed her palm firmly on the cement hood above the cock and watched the water gurgling merrily into her vessel below, the rest murmured impatience which deepened with the deepening of the tropical twilight.

' While they give three taps to every rich man's bungalow, they give us but one for our street,' lamented one in the group.

' There's not enough water there,' said another woman, in whom a generous attitude to civic life seemed to outweigh all personal comforts. The "there," meaning the Red Hills,she indicated with a sweep of her hand and a long, slow look in her eyes.

'There's enough water down *here*,' sharply added a third, pointing to the iron disc covering the manhole near by. ' They make up the supply from there,' she continued very knowingly, 'and send us in sickening packs to their hospitals.' She was the wife of a plumber. And, as though there was some truth in what she said, a dull sound came thudding through the silent air. It was from the Sewage Pumping Station, a furlong away in the direction of the Bay.

' Why talk such nonsense ?' cried a young woman impatiently, the only toiletted one in the group. 'There should be some order among us to catch water ; instead, we curse and quarrel and break our pots.'

' A queen indeed you are to talk of order,' sneeringly remarked the rest. There was a pause. Suddenly the silence was cut by a shrill cry, ' Valli, Valli-i-i-i,' coming from a house, an eyeshot to the right of the tap. The call was repeated and a woman appeared at the doorway.

' I am coming,' answered a girl of thirteen or thereabouts, from the midst of the water-catchers. ' I have not filled the vessel yet.' Her voice was rich in timbre but it broke off with a frightened tremor.

' Not filled your vessel yet, these twenty minutes, you lying minx,' rasped the tone angrily. ' Listening to the gossip, are you ? Come quick.'

The poor girl in fact was waiting and waiting for a chance to fill her vessel ; the women who talked or were engrossed in themselves seemed not to be aware of her presence ; the angry call and the trembling soft answer turned their eyes to her and her helplessness, and they very kindly made room for her. The girl filled her vessel, the distant voice fuming, ' Come quick, come quick ' the while. One of the women assisted the vessel to her hip, and she began walking briskly toward the house. But the ground was slimy, and her legs were weak and tender; in her agitation and hurry she slipped and fell. The waterpot broke to pieces, sounding like a muffled drum, and this was mingled with a quivering cry of pain. The girl had sprained her foot.

The woman at the door darted forward with an infuriated shriek and dragged the moaning sufferer by her hair into the house.

Those by the tap were too pained to intercede. They murmured in one sympathetic breath: 'Poor, poor Valli! That's what happens when a mother dies and the father wives again.'

II

Stepmotherhood has a tradition as hoary as snow on high hills, and Irulayi hand't simply the heart to tarnish its glory. And poor Varian! he had tied the *tali* round Irulayi's neck only because of an ardent desire, of a sense almost of sacred duty, to give his womb (she had waited and hoped for twelve long years) embittered Irulayi and her lush femininity, which was starved, rebelled against the unmasculinity of her man with a force of mingled contempt and disgust, and hated his children whom it regarded as imps mocking its unfulfilment.

Before he was in his fourth decade Varian had seen life in three colourful spheres; first he was a night-watch in one of the Chepauk offices, and the Serjeant, finding him one cold night

'In her agitation and hurry she slipped and fell.'

children a loving mother, a kindly soul, to care for them, to protect them. Chengalani, his boy aged eighteen, was employed as assistant to a trimmer in the local Aluminium Factory, and earned a daily wage of ten annas. Varian was proud of his boy, but he loved Valli more than he loved his son, for the mien of the girl, her voice, her manners, presented a little lovesome vision of the dear departed. No child had yet been born to him of Irulayi; he was quite satisfied with the present state of his paternity and never honestly endeavoured to enrich it. And the cpacity of her

sound asleep in the warm, carpeted staircase landing with one of his (the Serjeant's) beer bottles empty by his side had got him sacked the next morning for "gross" dereliction of duty; he was then a stoker in one of the suburban trains of the S. I. R., and being too rapid and dexterous with the shovel had burst the boiler of the engine and was fired, the real effect of this railroad service permeating his body with the colour of coal and making him ever after a thirsty man; and now the erewhile shovelled hand handled the scissors and the yardstick of a

salesman at a cloth merchant's. This rather incongruous variety of vocations had made Varian uncertain of his life which he had grown to regard with a degree of dull apathy. Even marble may wear with raining, but patient Varian wore not; like a rock he faced the destructive waves of his wife, whom now, womanhood of the slums, dark, exuberant, had inundated with animal passion. But the sight of her tyranny over his darlings sickened his heart and scarred his flesh; at such moments he wished his eyes were closed forever and his powerless limbs wither out of their joints.

Every night he came home with the feeling of a cow that is led to the slaughter house; to-night he was, more than usual, sad. As he walked along the sodden street, the rain drizzling and a cold wind blowing, he seemed to shiver; it was not due to the chill of the open, it was at the thougut of the chillier air that hung in his home. And within a few yards of his house, before the partly opened door, he stopped, arrested by the loud tone of his wife rolling in angry rebuke. There was a tightening round his heart; he knew too well the victim of her wrath.

'You've not swept the house, you've not scoured the pots, you've not washed the clothes, you dirty scavenging thing,' the voice volleyed, 'and you've gossiped at the tap. What bad things were you talking of me to those women there?'

'I've not talked anything bad of you, and I've finished sweeping and cleaning long ago, mother,' trembled a girlish voice in answer.

'Not talked anything! And catching water all the while like a dear, were you? And you 've broken my biggest, my best waterpot. And yet, you cross me. I shall break your head for that.'

A blow sounded and then an anguished cry.

'Don't beat me, don't beat me. O please don't. It was not my mistake. I slipped down. O father! O brother!'

'Indeed, yell for that precious father and brother of yours. I shall send the whole lot of you to the gutter. And, for your disobedience, have this.' With which she shot into the kitchen and shot back with a heated iron ladle.

'O don't, O don't,' rang the piteous cry.

And ere he knew what was happening and decided to run in, swiftly tucking up her saree she had branded the girl on her thigh.

His daughter's scream licked his body like a tongue of fire and Varian asked hoarsely of his wife: 'What have you done?'

'Done!' she echoed with a snort of scorn. And so you are not drunk to-night.'

'I shall make you soon talk in another way,' he gasped, and, closing upon her, raised his clenched hand, the strength of a giant seeming to animate his frame.

But the raised hand did not descend; it was caught from behind and an agitated voice spoke: 'Father, keep off. This is quite unlike you. She will bring the whole neighbourhood to our door.'

'Let me alone, let me alone,' he cried and attempted to strike, but his boy held him back. Sudden passion had stiffened his nerves taut like strings of steel. And Chengalani was glad he had not loitered after work; he was in time to prevent what he saw would have ended tragically.

'Chenga, Chenga, if only you know what that monster has done to your sister, you would not have kept me down thus. I was mad in every limb of my body; your touch, your words woke me to my senses. Yes, she would have brought the whole neighbourhood to our door.'

Irulayi looked contempt on the consoled and the consoling, and without a word sailed into the kitchen slamming the door after her.

Chengalani walked to where his sister lay in a sobbing heap, and murmuring warm words of love and endearment raised her to her feet. The hard conditions of her life had given the young girl the mature understanding of a woman; nevertheless she looked a pretty birdlike breviary of emotions and her pathetic helplessness touched his brotherly heart.

'Don't cry, my dear,' he said, drying her tears with his cloth. 'But . . . but did you provoke her so much as to get that ?' And he pointed to the wale showing swollen and ugly in the delicate skin.

'Oh, brother, how can you think of me that way?' Her lips quivered and tears began to crowd afresh in her eyes.

'I never really meant so, my Pearl,' he consoled, smoothing her crumpled hair. 'I've brought you the bangles you asked for yesterday.'

'Bangles!' cried the girl, purring and nestling to his side like a kitten.

'And something to sweeten your sweet mouth too,' he slyly added.

'Sweetmeats and bangles!' She smacked her lips and smiled at her wrists and pressed the packets to her bosom. Girlish rapture over the new-got things had wiped off the pain of the past two hours.

Sitting on the floor, with chin on palm, Varian watched his children talking and making themselves happy. He uttered not a word. His heavy heart was worlds beyond—away with his sainted wife.

III

It was twelve o'clock the next day. The bell of the Aluminium Factory clanged the hour in rhythmic strokes, and the sound throbbed, thinned, and trembled away into the rattle of traffic. Soon workmen trouped out to eat their noonday meal.

To the left of the factory, there is a rice godown—two blocks of low-roofed buildings with a wide space between, dimmed by the cool shade of trees—and here the workmen eat, rest, and chat with their wives, mothers, or sisters who bring the meal, till the bell-call summons them to work again.

It was a company of about fifty workmen, young and old, sitting in rows and eating. At the eastern end, leaning against the trunk of a tree, a lad was engaged apparently in deep thought. Once or twice he looked at those eating in contenment and a look as of pain flitted across his face.

An elderly workman belching deeply after a sumptuous meal, chewing betel and caressing a piece of tobacco, approached him and asked, 'Meal not come yet ?'

'No,' he replied.

You had shared mine, dear boy!'

'Why, I'm sure to get *mine*,' and he turned his eyes toward the road. 'Ah, sure there she is,' cried he joyously, 'the little dear coming along.' Love, affection, sympathy, were minglingly vibrant in every fibre of his voice.

A girl whose saree was all stains and patches and little rents, holding in her hand a cylindrical pot tied up in an untidy rag approached them hastily.

Seeing her come, the old man stepped aside.

The joyous look in the face of the lad changed into one of pained anxiety.

'What's the matter, Valli?' he asked tensely. Your eyes are swollen and red with weeping and. . . .' He had caught sight of her bare wrists.

'Where are the bangles ?'

'She broke them,' came the reply in quiet misery.

'Tell me all.'

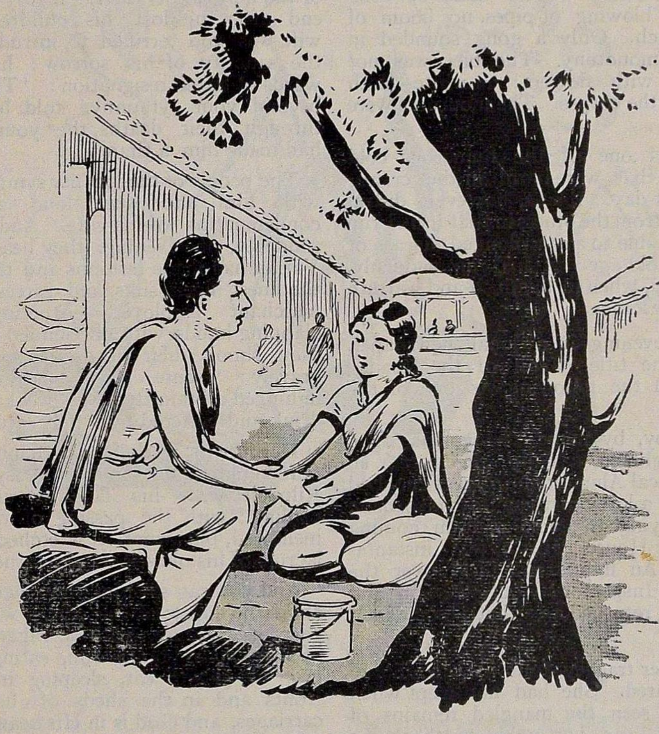
'She said that father was drinking away the money and that you never gave your full earnings to her but could buy me bangles and sweetmeats. "When the belly cries for food," she said, "you want bangles, do you, daughter of a bitch ?" And catching hold of my hands she struck them together.' She gestured the act, the news coming the while in sad short relays.

'Daughter of a bitch ! he echoed dryly, the blood drumming in his veins. 'O mother mine, could you hear and bear this insult!'

He then took her little hands into his and regarded her fingers scarred with rough kitcten work, stroking her wrists round which the broken bangles had made scratches in crescents and lines and loops. Then he looked at the scarlet wale on her thigh yesternight's branding had so mercilessly wrought; his brave heart swelled; tears gathered in his eyes, and there came out of him a sound as of a moan. Seeing her brother

cry, the girl's pent-up misery burst anew and in one river of grief the two streams of tears mingled and moved.

He hastily wiped his eyes. Into his young, boyish face had come a strange expression of manly resolution and hatred. For a moment it softened when he strained his sister to his bosom and kissed her weeping eyes, her clammy cheeks.



'He took her little hands into his.'

The bell rang for the rally. He heard it not. Some workmen gazed at him as they bustled out. He saw them not. And to him the humming road seemed to subside to the quiet of a wood; he felt lonely there peering into the face of Sorrow. But Anger soon burnt Sorrow to cinders and ashes and out of the ashes rose Hatred, white and violent: Anger and Hatred, flame calling to flame for the dance of death.

'She will kill her soon if she goes on so,' he panted, 'but before that, I shall crack her damned skull and send her to hell.' With which, seizing one of the loose spokes of a cartwheel lying in a heap near by, he rushed out of the godown like one possessed.

Valli stood stupefied in girlish wonder and horror. She tried to call him back. But the tongue was parched in her mouth.

About five minutes passed. Suddenly there was a swishing and humming of

electric wires, clatter of wheels, clanking of a trambell; through this, the heavy trundling of a lorry and a long, loud honking. Next a preternatural hush! There was a note of tragedy in the distant sounds that mingled so violently.

IV

It was a quiet, cheerless funeral march. There was no tinkle of tom-tom, no blowing of pipes, no boom of the conch. Only a gong sounded in hollow monotony. The bier was not decked with flowers; a white cloth covered the corpse. The mourners were few.

It was one of the numerous cold remains that were burnt in the crematory that day. It was, however, distinguished from the others in that it had run cold, not due to any prolonged disease or wasting old age. It had run suddenly, icily cold, when in the flush and warmth of adolescence.

That evening in a local newspaper, under the title "Toll of the Roads" appeared the following as one of the items:

'A boy, by name Chengalani, aged about eighteen, a daily wage-earner in in the local Aluminum Co., was knocked down by a lorry carrying tar macadam, while trying to avoid a tram coming from Ice House. Death was instantaneous. An inquest was held over the body by Inspector K—,of—Station and the Jury returned a verdict of accidental death.'

Blacker tragdey followed. Valli had disappeared. She had not wept when she had seen the mangled remains of all that was her noble brother; the meaning of his last passionate words had dawned fully on her womanly understanding. She had looked an eloquent world of reproach at her stepmother, but had not spoken to her. She had seen her brother carried to the crematory; then, and only then had she known her greatest loss and given vent to it in a heart-rending shriek. And in the grey twilight of that evening she had quietly slipped out of the house. The wretched father had searched for her in vain all through the night. The next morning her body floated in the Temple tank—a black bundle in the green stagnating water. While she was alive she had heard of bodies floating thus.

V

Speechless he sat and desolate, companion with his grief in a desolate corner of the house, not leaving it for days on end after he lost his children. His wife was too terrified to intrude upon the sanctity of his sorrow; his calm words of bitter resignation: 'They are beyond your tyrannny,' told her that through their deaths, the young ones had made him a titan.

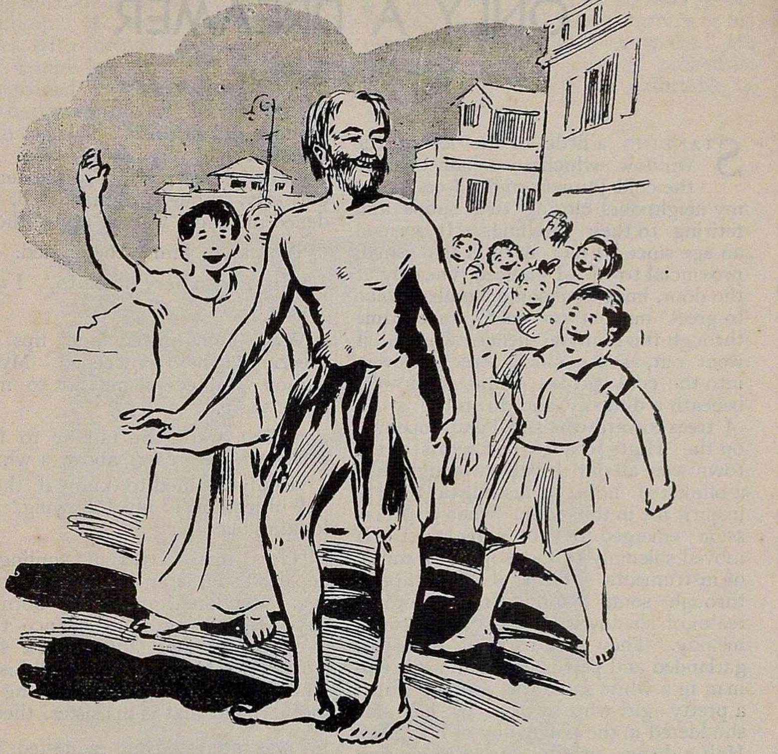
The people of the locality sympathised with him and were loud in their condemnation of his wife. And, when suddenly, one evening, they heard that Varian had made festoons and tassels of the finest linen, silks, and sarees of his merchant employer, capering and clapping hands with unbounded delight, they shook their heads and expressed gravely: 'Acute grief has naturally unhinged a brain that was weakened by drink and battered by wifely cruelty.'

During its early malignance the unfortunate man shook the asylum in Kilpauk with his laughter and his wailing; with the passing of days he mellowed, but what a wretched simulacrum of his old self was he turned into!

And you can see him now wandering about the streets of the city, a withered, bearded creature, with a ragged trail of street arabs booing him, eating whatever he gets to eat, sleeping in shop-fronts and in the sheds of hackney-carriages, and God is in His heaven and all is right with the World.

Irulayi had left the place. People hereabout believed that she had gone to live with her parents in Chingleput. For about a year nothing was heard of her. And her appearance in the City was as strange as it was dramatic. It was in the Presidency Magistrate's Court, Egmore.

It happened she was the proprietress of a Pleasure House within the limits of



'Wandering about the streets of the city, a withered, bearded creature, with a ragged trail of street arabs booing him.'

this teeming and turbulent City. She knew the risk she was running, but she was bold and challenging in her infamous eminence. And when the noble heart of a female saviour throbs with pity for her fallen sisters, weeps for their redemption, and forges an Act in the Council, though man wishes for a brave nude world, this secret trade mark is sure to be discovered and blotted out.

It was a raid in which the Police excelled all their previous raids. And Irulayi was arrested and led to the Police Station, but not before she had knocked down two of the constables and jammed them between the door panels.

Irulayi was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and before she was half-way though her term in the Vellore Jail she was transferred to the asylum in Kilpauk. The dead were avenged. Oblivious are her hours now; her stormy past, the doctors say, stands seriously in her way of becoming sane again.

ONLY A DREAMER

By RAMAKRISHNAN

STANDING a little to the left of the window which was half open to the cold January night I could see my neighbours closing their shops and retiring to their dwellings. It seemed an age since I had lived in that small provincial town. I glanced uneasily at the door, imagining some familiar voice to greet me, but no such voice came through the hum of silence around. I went out, as the clock struck eleven, into the cool garden white of flowers beneath a dim sky, and down the grove of trees toward the small gate opening on the High Road. The lights of the town were all out. I walked straight like a blinkered horse, whistling a tune to inspirit me in the gloom when a procession emerged out of a by-street. It moved solemnly to the sonorous music of instruments. I felt as if I had slipped through some happy chance into a realm of shadows alive with a strange melody. They were carrying a corpse, garlanded and perfumed. An aged woman in a white saree was weeping whilst a pretty girl who walked by her side shuddered in the poignancy of her grief. Half-a-dozen priests were chanting hymns for the peace of the departed soul. A tall broadchested man with a shaven head paced slowly, carrying an earthen bowl emitting curls of smoke. But one man in the company drew my attention more did the rest. He was small and harassed looking, inclined to plumpness and wearing hornrimmed spectacles. I wanted to follow him up and discover all about the dead man. My idle curiosity worked up in me a strange series of complicated surmises. Soon I was by his side requesting him if I could accompany him. He civilly answered that if such was my wish, I surely could. I put on a sad look on my face to befit the occasion. On seeing me, some in the campany began to whisper among themselves. Every few yards they turned round on me in wonder and surprise. This act of theirs annoyed me very much. But I was not to be so easily browbeaten; my curiosity, though ill-mannered, emboldened me and I walked up to them.

'You knew him ?' they asked.

'No, I wish very much to,' I replied.

'Oh!'

With chins lifted and lips curled sneeringly they proceeded. My companion winked at me not to make a scene there.

'What were you talking to them ?' His voice rose scarce above a whisper.

'I only wanted to know if they had any objection to my following,' I said looking blankly.

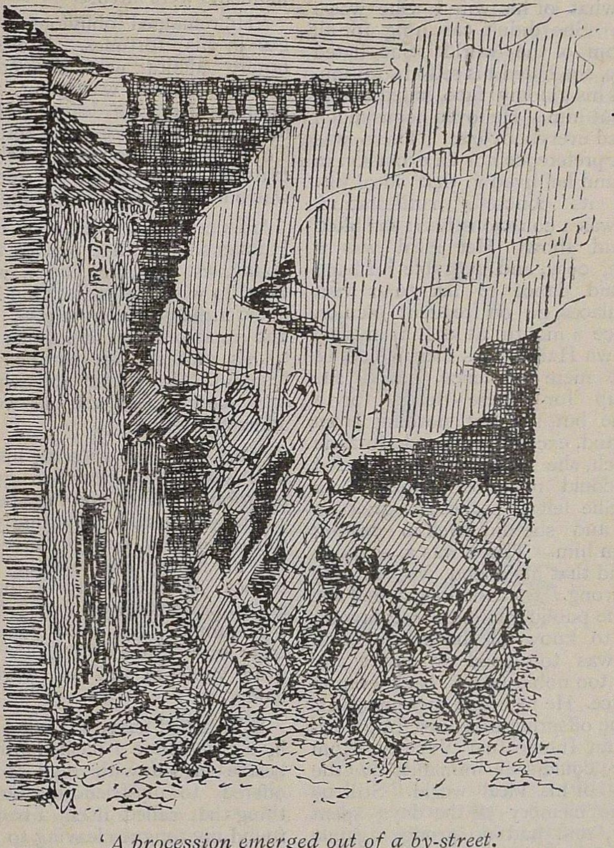
'Good man,' cried he smiling, 'the departed soul is an uncommon personage. Men like him are not born every day. No religion is an offence to him. Well, his is a long story, and a strange story too. He lived a life all his own. The old woman who is weeping is his mother, and that is his sister, there.'

I was interested and requested him to proceed.

'He was the son of a wealthy paper merchant (the gentleman began), and in the whole district there was none richer than he. He was a precocious child and grew up to be a sensitive, intelligent young man. He plunged in his studies so wholeheartedly that he hardly ever remembered he had to live in the work-a-day world. He was never conscious of his responsibilities. He loved solitude and isolation. Nobody ever liked him in fact. He was called a monomaniac, a pervert, a sickly abnormity. And he himself did not know why he was so hateful and disagreeable. He had an irresistible impulse to come into touch with concrete life and live it to the core with the ardour and ecstasy of a great artist. He was too timid in society, too

baffling to be understood, and too exalted to reach up. He moved with nervous gestures, with furtive steps for fear the world would let him down. And so he remained in the borderland between happiness caused by his concep-

his unusual excitement he was gone. Nobody knew the secret torture of his mind, for he hardly ever spoke. He exerted a sort of curious prehensile influence and one felt uncomfortable in his presence.



'A procession emerged out of a by-street.'

tions and unhappiness caused by his factual life.

'One day he cried. A certain sense of artificiality dawned on him. His heart was well-nigh maimed with grief and he came running to me. He clutched my arm with feverish fingers and before I could get over my surprise at

'His father died and the responsibility of running the house fell heavily on him. His mother was old and his sister was unmarried. Though not a mysoginist, he disliked the idea of marriage; but his mother's pleadings changing into sharp reproaches he got married. It was an escape; it meant nothing

more to him ; and there lay the tragedy of it.

'His sister felt lonely and neglected in that gloomy house. She thought him haughty, cold as an iceberg ; and misunderstood him to the degree of cruelty.

'And what of his wife ? She was a philistine. She didn't care a fig for all the wisdom of the world. She hated his library, she hated his self-absorption, she hated his gloomy face, hated everything about him. He loved her as much as he loved everybody else. There was neither a preference nor an exclusion in his love and he lived in that ideal forgetful of its concrete manifestation. His wife was a conscious fuss ; she liked wealth and show. Her ideal was a handsome, cosy, and portable husband who would dance to her tune: visit picture palaces, go on frequent picnics, attend once a month at least a musical in the Town Hall. This then would be *life* ; not mere existence. And she looked up for these things for a long time but she got nothing from her husband, except queer and fantastic ideas which, she said with ill-concealed disgust, could never be harnessed to action. She felt a perpetual grief in her life ; and she did well in cutting away from him. There was a scandal; people said that my friend was entirely on the wrong. So assiduously had she created the public opinion in her favour. He came to know of the whole truth but he was too good to refute any charges, too noble to hit back even in self-defence. He regarded such incidents as but the offspring of a Vast Imperfection, of an Intellectual Vacuity, from which he could save humanity by the discovery of his ideal world. Still he loved the memory of the days spent with her, and had no grudge against her.

'His mother was a rash, assuming sort of woman. She took many things for granted. She was quick to understand, quicker still to misunderstand, and quickest to dash off an opinion on insufficient data. She was sure that her son loved another girl and she believed in the scandal set afloat by her daughter-in-law. To her, he was almost a wreck, a moral ruin, just tottering on the brink of insanity.

'He never took his proper place in society. He had braved the tortures of his heart and the strictures of his people to live the life he loved. His moments were intense.

'He remained oblivious of the changes in his fortunes. A crisis in his family affairs was imminent. His father's business was going poorer and poorer after his death. His sister's marriage had cost him a pretty penny. To crown all he was stricken with malaria. And when he recovered he was but a bundle of bones and skin.

'His creditors were soon upon him. Human sharks that opened their ravenous jaws for juicy flesh, what could they do with bones and skin ? He lived in an atmosphere of chase, suspicion, and imprisonment. He spoke touchingly to his mother, but her heart did not respond. He wrote to his wife to come and see him ; as well he would have addressed a wall.

'One day, on entering his house, I overheard a conversation going on in his room. " Well, you may be a scholar, a demigod, a saint, anything you choose to call yourself, but you have got to pay me my money next week. You may be sick, you may be dying, but you have got to pay me my money. You are a big humbug, but mind you, you can't trifle with Shankar Lal." It was the gruff voice of the marwari money-lender.

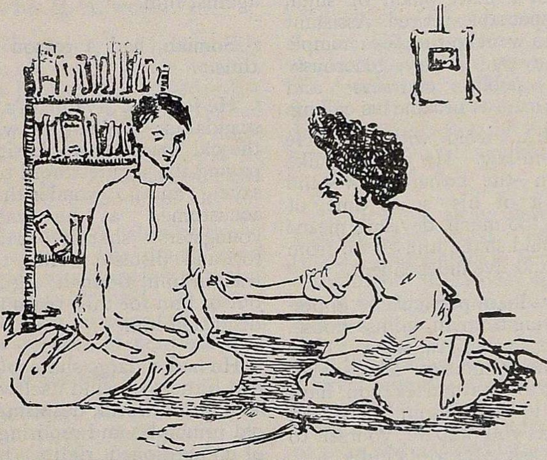
'I breathed heavily. I felt I was thrust by a cruel lance. I dashed into the room beside myself with rage at the insult offered to my friend by the loathsome thing that called itself a banker but I found my tongue cleaving to the roof—his face which shone like a lamp of the heavens arrested me, thrusting the marwari into a penumbra of utter insignificance.

' " Brother,—he always called me like that,—" it is a sad world we live in. Garish outside, it is at bottom an unrelieved picture of ugliness, full of thirst for blood. There is nothing in common

between me and the world in which I live. Life is a moving irony, a confusing paradox. There is a fatal lack of cohesion between its head and heart. Ideals blunder into a hostile country only to build a tomb over themsevles the moment they appear. It is not possible to love and live up to it. My whole life is a travail of an unfulfilled ideal, so I regard everyone's is. All's over with me and I don't mind dying any day cheerfully."

'Seven days after the dawn of this ominous enlightenment he sank into his bed never to rise again.'

what I had heard. My companion dropped a tear as the noble body of his friend was thrown on the funeral pyre. Through the smoky flames which now plumed up, I strained to see the face on the pyre, and saw it as in a glorious vision. Something more than an emotion ran through my being: it was a shuddering sense of inexplicable mystery at the waste of beautiful ideas like blossoms on burning desert sands. Death in a field of battle, in the act of a vile crime, could not have excited a trifle of the emotion which purified my soul.



'You have got to pay me my money.'

Here quite overcome, the gentleman turned his face away from me. After a minute's silence which seemed to me an eternity he spoke more to himself, than to me: 'All his life was one intense moment of misery.'

'It was, it was,' I echoed fervidly.

We passed through a narrow gate to the crematory. I stood much moved by

Bidding farewell to my companion I walked through the town growing weird under a louring sky. As I was approaching my rooms, some instinct made me look up; and even as I looked I saw a star trembling in a clump of three and falling with an iridescent shriek. And my mind murmured: 'Does a star also die when a dreamer dies?'

ENLISTMENT

By M. GOPAL RAO

HE looked like a cat, did Avadhani. He had a perfectly round head, a firm chin, broad brow, and the ears were set very close in the whitish hair of the skull. He was aged fifty-three.

He lived in T—.

A steady-going business-like man was Avadhani in the eyes of most of his friends, rather given to a good dinner (they say all ancients are so), and keenly appreciative of a smart pinch of snuff, but still a respectable retired Assistant Engineer who went to the Siva temple unfailingly every Friday, generously donated to public charities and flourished the cane as became his calling.

Somiah, M.A., lived with him. He was his son-in-law. He did not like living with him—the father-in-law—and he spent most of his spare time, of which he had too much, devising means whereby he could shake himself off from the old man, and live independent.

Nor was Avadhani particularly appreciative of having Somiah in his house. He knew what sons-in-law were. They are the limit, he would say. Like snakes that bite you to death after you have warmed them in your bosom. They sit in your chair as you prepare yourself to sit and coolly ask you to 'kindly . . . .' if you are present in the room when they happen to meet their wives. They are everywhere. Try as he might, old Avadhani could not really like Somiah. His air, especially towards Sita, was simply proprietorial; his behaviour towards himself, Avadhani, was anything but commendable.

The only thing that Somiah had ever done that had won his approval was to get his poll cropped. The old man approved it all the more because he considered it so amazing that he should spend so much time combing his hair when he could have easily clipped them without actually "disfiguring himself".

Somiah was short of stature, smart, and fair. He had a Ronald Colman moustache, dark eyes, pimpled cheeks, and a nose that was all nostrils. He would always talk in a sneering tone and make people clench their fists. Distinctly, he was a revolutionary; his immediate neighbour chuckled when he said anything funny; and the old cat could not bear to see people chuckling over private jokes. It always suggested the possibility of the joke being turned against him.

Somiah had a reason for behaving thus.

He felt that Avadhani's manners were scandalous. When he was addressing the old man, he would sit still without paying the slightest heed to what he was saying; and no wonder that, Avadhani, accustomed as he was to address youngsters sharply, caused discomfort and distaste. Half the good that was in him, Somiah argued, had gone out of him for this reason. It frankly disgusted him.

He had a large share of pride which had hitherto found itself very comfortable in the world, despising old men and old principles and reposing in the sense of unquestioned rights; but now, after coming to this place, he felt that this same confidence—he called it confidence—met with nothing but rebuffs and sneers. He was too clear-sighted not to be aware that Avadhani's standard of things was certainly higher in the eyes of the world than that of the people he had been living amidst, and that, brought in contact with it, he, Somiah, appeared awkward and stupid; he was by no means indifferent to this; and his pride was wounded, which nullified his boyish self-satisfaction and gave him something of a rebel's susceptibility.

He had renounced everything when he took Sita to wife. It was a strange

submission to cruel fate. There were times when he felt that the fulfilment of his promise to the old man—to marry his daughter—was something too hard for human nature. He had given his word without considering the future at all. He might as well have committed suicide.

But again there were many feelings arguing on his side, besides the sense that life had been made hard for him by marrying Sita. He saw a possibility by much squeezing, of forcing the man to get a decent job, and then he could quit. The old man had certainly influence and he could fix him up anywhere he liked. But would he? And if he did not, what was his M. A. worth?

He could not answer, but he sincerely felt that the old man was a lunatic. How could he be sure the father-in-law wouldn't help him? It was true he had snapped out once that he would have nothing to do with him. But did he mean what he said? Do lunatics mean what they say? He wondered.

He woke up with a start at twelve o'clock that night. The doubt came back again. He was conscious of a dull feeling stealing over him. He found himself filled with a sense of missed opportunities and lack of continuity.

How could he ask him?

He dared not ask. He was not used to action, not direct. Instead of expressing his desire to him straight, he would depute the wife to do it for him. She would do it better and willingly too. Anyone would oblige an M. A. for the matter of that.

For a time his mind pictured a big troop of clerks marching in rows of two. His face became firm as he imagined himself standing by a table and rigidly scrutinizing them tumbling past him. He mopped his brow, it was sweating.

II

Somiah sat thinking in his bedroom. The noise of the street below was heard and felt in gusts that came in mixed with the dry dust. By contrast the inside of the room seemed cool.

It was nine in the morning.

'Bombay', he thought, 'Bombay—a chance?' Then slowly analysing every word, he began to re-read for the *n*th time, since its arrival an hour ago, Gopi's welcome letter. It was deliciously astounding.

'I've been wondering'—it ran—'whether you would be prepared to get into the Railway Audit. I am afraid unless you show some distinct merit, the office shall not be able to pay more. But if a salary of Rs. 60 per mensem would tempt you to leave M—'

'And sixty a month,' murmured Somiah, 'sixty rupees a month! Tut! It wouldn't tempt a dog. And arriving at this conclusion, he folded the letter and thrust it into the deep recesses of the drawer. For already his mind was made up. No, it would not tempt him —Somiah, M. A.

All the same, as he descended to the kitchen, his mind wavered. Sixty rupees! And Railway Service! It was substantive. Relatively speaking! And yet to do this, would mean clothes etc. Besides, what about his wife?

In the kitchen he made a number of discreet inquiries to himself about this appointment; he looked it up in his brain where he found a frank and detailed page and decided to accept it.

He would go there first as a clerk (though he would tell others he was an upper grade clerk), receptive and keenly perceptive, for which his superior would surely compliment him. Stern at times but never vulgar. If the head clerk wanted tutoring in manners, why, he should have it! He would mildly rebuke the office superintendent, if he thought it was necessary and really constructive. He would point out how Jones, the stenog had taken the word "here" wrong and how the despatching clerk had made the wrong entry. He would encourage these petty clerks — poor fellows, they needed encouragement.

It would be his greatest opportunity.

And yet, as he thought thus, he marvelled if it was not a bit low for a Master of Arts. How he had yearned for a couple of hundreds at least to start with!

In the corner, Avadhani sat sipping his coffee. It was his second dose. Somiah sat on the threshold.

I met Mr Naidu this morning, Somiah,' the father-in-law said, 'and he has assured me he would take you to the Home Member.'

'What for?' Somiah affected surprise.

'Why, you asked to be taken to him last night. In connection with the M. S. M. affair.'

'Oh, so good of you, Sir?'

That was it. This fresh intelligence delighted him. How very useful was this M. A.?

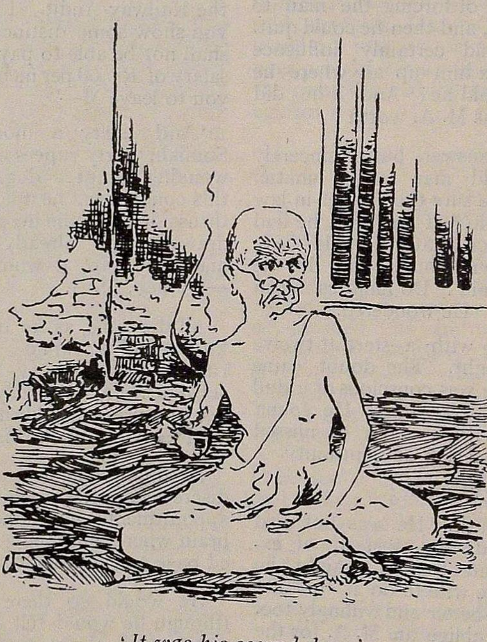
They talked generalities for about five minutes, at the end of which, he touched upon the Bombay job.

'I got this an hour ago, Sir.' He held between his fingers his friend's letter as he would a cigarette.

'Oh!' with nonchalance.

'But I wonder if it would suit me. I am not good at maths, and the Audit Department, that's the place—does nothing but maths. I can't learn it hereafter, like some people. I don't know if I could be of any use to such offices. It's money I want. Money and a decent job. You don't know what it means to a young man like me with ambitions in life.'

'Hm,' grunted the old man and slowly picked his way to the kitchen.



'It was his second dose.'

III

One evening, when Avadhani returned home rather early after his constitutional his daughter met him at the door.

'Father,' he is going away somewhere,' she said in a low voice, her face full of trouble.

'What?' Avadhani was rudely startled.

'He said he would go away from here, once for all,' she continued, wiping away a tear.

'Where's he now?' he asked her hastily.

'Probably in his room. When I left him, he was putting on his shirt.'

'Then wait.'

Stepping in, he paced the long narrow corridor, his brows wrinkled and his teeth chattering. As he turned into the hall, the hasty flinging of some door aroused his attention. He looked curiously round; his face suddenly cloured a dull red. The most cruel restlessness grew upon him, a feverish excitement amounting to perfect agony. It seemed as if millions of pins were pricking him all over, so intensely did the blood tingle in his veins. But all of a sudden, this dreadful heat was turned into an icy-chill, as his ear caught the unmistakable creaking of the street door closing with that gradual slowness which spells caution. Still he moved not, but continued to listen.

What could this mean?

He walked towards the street door. 'Sita! Sita! Where's he? Has he gone?' he called out.

There was no reply.

Avadhani stood still. Life to him seemed miserable. As he walked back to his room, with a gloominess that deceptively looked like deep meditation, he brooded over the whole affair, over Somiah's history, and valued and appraised him, his look, his manners, his talk. That was indeed a difficult problem. He frowned as the dismissed thought came back again and again. Then he said to himself: 'It was better the fellow cleared out. I wonder that he should allow himself to be disturbed by such trifles!' He even pricked himself so, but when he saw his daughter, his face fell. He felt vanquished. He could not speak.

*   *   *   *

Slipping the shirt on, Somiah left the house. The lane was quiet; no one was about except a stray dog trotting to lie on some garbage heap. He walked past the many familiar houses. Along the lane, the doors and windows were open. It was not yet closing time. Through the doorways, the lights came in patches.

He ought to look into Abbiah's, he thought, and bid him goodbye. But now he would be eating his meal and the idea no sooner than formed filled him with a sort of disgust.

He had walked out because this was his only method of escape — escape from the boredom. Escape was a necessity.

Nimble of naked feet, he hurried to the end, tore his shirt open for he was perspiring awfully, and fanned his flushed face.

It should be half past seven. They should be eating in the house now. Somiah grinned, then he sighed. The sight meant his starvation that night. He doubted if they really missed him at mealtime. Ever thought of it. No, they wouldn't. Indifferent folk who minded their own comforts and neglected others.

He stood undecided for a long time.

'I am destined for something high. The fellow does not know it. D — n him. He wouldn't like anything good, the cat!'

Yet at the same time he felt certain Avadhani could lift him out of the mire now. He was a man of enormous influence. There was something in influence. He thought through the noise of the traffic. He felt grateful towards noise. It had always encouraged thoughts. It quickened his brain. It was mainly responsible for his M. A. Degree.

He waited sitting on a pial, a hundred yards away from the house, for about a couple of hours hoping that Avadhani would come and take him

home. But between Avadhani and hope the gulf was too wide to be bridged.

It seemed only the other day that he and Sita had been so happy, full of hopes, and plans for the future. How pretty it had then seemed! He had suffered defeats since then. Defeats are step-stones to success, she had said. Yes, they were at the height of bliss.

It seemed only the other day, but it was one full week ago. Sita might be crying now. She might be quite old with crying. He pitied her. Poor girl!

In the middle of the night he returned home.

* * * *

Somiah is now calm; his eyes are sad with the sadness of wisdom. His senses are not acute, and sometimes he feels he has made a grave mistake.

But he is full of hope and confidence. He is growing livelier and predicts great events. He waits for these with patience and lives with the thought of them.

He is now a clerk in the Survey Office passing rich with forty rupees a month.

With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come!

You may be a fine, upstanding, respectable citizen, but a banana skin doesn't care.

*

Many a man nowadays has to keep two wives—his own and his son's.

*

As soon as a girl gets past the age of making faces at boys she starts making eyes at them.

*

Footprints on the sands of time are not made by sitting down.

*

A Constitutional monarchy is one in which the king never becomes ill.

*

An epistle is the wife of an apostle.

*

The male inhabitants of Paris are called Parisites, and the female inhabitants are called flames.

*

Matrimony is a place where souls suffer for a time on account of their sins.

*

The man to-day who hides behind a woman's skirt is not a coward; he is a magician.

*

Girls in the Mohammedan religion never see their husbands before they are married. Some wives in the Christian religion seldom see their husbands after they are married.

STARVED

By P. S. NATARAJA SARMA

I MET him at a theatre in the city. It was Mr Ramesam, the rising advocate from Mylapore, who took upon himself the unpleasant task of introducing us.

'Mr S—, you know, journalist, miscellaneous writer, *et cetera*,' he began with his usual horse-laugh.

'And Mr Gangadhar,—'

'You fumble for something to follow it up with, do you? Loafer—put it that way. Or tramp, say—though I fear it sounds a bit swakish. But tut! there she is at it again.'

And indeed he was right. The dancer from the north was at it again. The hum of human voices stopped like an electric bell. A thousand interested eyes began to follow her movements with a delight their owners scarcely perceived. They were led, unknowing, to an enchanted world where all was mirth and music and glamour.

I stole a look at my newly-introduced companion. A lean, lank, neatly-dressed man with an eager look in his eyes. He sat motionless, intent on the dance.

It was late when the performance ended and brought the three of us together again.

'We have seen a wee bit of art—don't you think so?' Mr Gangadhar asked me.

I thought so.

'It is not always you get a dose of this kind. True art, Sir—it invigorates you, fills you with a new life.'

He was silent for a little while.

'I am not one of those,' he began afresh, 'who sing the dirge that true art is dead, that the moderns have lost the artistic sense. It is flimsy nonsense, Sir. The only thing in my opinion is: In the old days they looked at things from a bad angle and lied; whereas now we look at things from a right angle and speak the truth. Perhaps you are not interested in the subject.'

I said I was.

All the way back in the tram, he talked about art; his talk was not mere balderdash; it was sensible and earnest and I relished it, though I did not quite agree with him in certain things. (I have got my own views and you shall never know them as they have nothing to do with this narrative). What attracted me most was his sincerity. When once you had heard him, you knew that he *felt* what he said. He was not one of those fashionable young men who promenade the sacred temple of art just for a leisurely escape from *ennui*; he lived and worshipped there.

I had altogether a pleasant evening. Strangely enough, we both unconsciously left Mr Ramesam in the background though he seemed perfectly at his ease in that quarter. We parted like old friends. My friend came down a bit from his ethereal heights and talked of things earthy.

'You will look me up on Sunday, won't you? You know my address? Yes. Mind it's an appointment. Good night.'

2

I did look him up on Sunday. And it was a visit I shall never forget.

It was with great difficulty that I found out the house where he lodged. But I didn't know that fresh difficulties lay in my path. I met a surly-looking man on the ground floor (he turned out afterwards to be the landlord), and asked for Mr Gangadhar. The name worked on him like smelling-salt and brought forth a nasty ejaculation from his mouth; and he merely pointed upwards with his eyes—whether at the sky or the ceiling I could not tell. I went upstairs and knocked at a door at which a middle-aged gentleman came

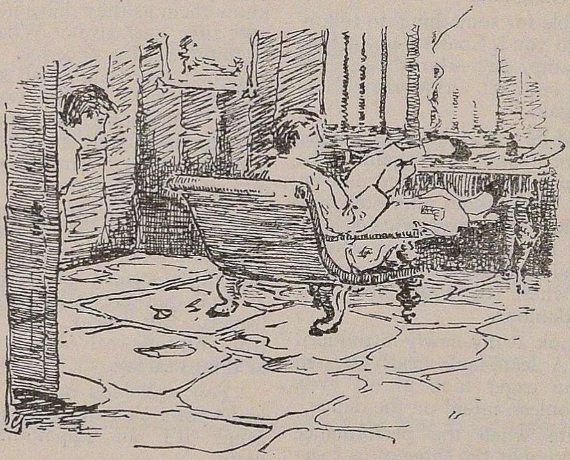
out all in a temper and tussling with a turban. This personage would enlighten me no more than the landlord; he too pointed upwards, though he did it with his finger. Suspecting a silly joke, I went down the verandah and saw a ladder. I tried it and it landed me straight into my friend in a little cabin.

A cabin? yes. I think that is how I should describe the fantastic apartment in which I found Mr Gangadhar. A kind of shanty with a thatched roof and wooden walls, it rose abruptly from nowhere and stood out in the void like a printer's mistake. There was something doggedly temporary about the cabin as about the atmosphere of a third-class railway waiting-room. Once you got into it, a queer feeling came upon you that life was an illusion and that something was just going to happen round the corner. These were my future experiences; as I set foot for the first time on the crudely-cemented floor, my feeling was one of triumph.

Mr Gangadhar was sitting on a broken armchair with his back to the door and his legs asprawl on the table in front. He was smoking and the smell of cheap cigarette fumes filled the air. He was not the fashionable man about town I had been introduced to; there was something gone from him altogether. He wore a pair of flowing pyjamas visibly tattered at the fringes and a shirt without cuff-links. His thick, unpomaded hair fell in picturesque confusion over his forehead. He seemed to have grown suddenly old since I had seen him last. Stripped of its make-up his face looked impaired and his wild eyes wandered listlessly about him.

Everything about his room and himself was untidy. The floor was strewn with scraps of paper, cigarette cartons, and burnt matches. His table was the last word in confusion; it was littered with newspaper cuttings, magazines, and again the vicious cigarette cartons. A couple of brushes, broken pencil stumps, a box of water-colours, a pen and ink, a broken bit of a comb, a piece of charcoal —and a few other articles lay precariously on it. Everything bespoke disorder and an artistic indifference.

'Oh, it's you, Mr S—'. He rose from his chair, pushed it forward to me and made a seat for himself on the table. 'What do you think of my lodgings?



'With his back to the door and his legs asprawl on the table.'

Pretty dirty, isn't it? But you get a lot of air, that's why I took it.'

I was sure it was not the only reason.

He offered me a cigarette and we smoked. I have always held the opinion that tobacco is a magician, even cheap tobacco. Whatever the views of the moralist and the doctor upon its effects, even they cannot deny this: it creates a freemasonry a non-smoker cannot understand. As we puffed silently and with the relish of born smokers, we forgot that our intimacy was only six days old and conversed without reserve.

It was my friend who did most of the talking. He came back to his old theme—art. He was eloquent and his eloquence was wild, fiery. He had strong likes and dislikes, and whatever he did not like he lashed with a whip. I felt a queer inclination to compare his discourse on art to a missionary's sermon; it was so vigorous and excited. But after hearing him for the greater part of an hour I could not give him a label; he did not belong to this school or that school of thinking. He was not an idealist; he was not a realist; he was not this, he was not that. He chose his idols from different denominations, but he didn't belong to any of them. Microscoped with technical eyes he was, indeed, a bundle of inconsistencies—if a perversity in individual taste can be called an inconsistency.

'I am an innate lover of the beautiful,' he wound up the talk, 'especially the beautiful in actual life. The concrete has greater attraction for me than the abstract. I believe matter is infinitely more complex and intricate than mind. The mind stops at a certain stage, it has serious limitations; but matter is unbounded in its variety, in its beauty. Material beauty is something precious—I would call it the Ultimate Good, the nearest approach to Perfection, what they call God......'

Common things all of them, but he said them with the solemnity of a prophet. And when you heard him, you forgot that he was clothed in a twice-turned shirt and pyjamas with numberless rents in them, or that you were sitting in a precarious cabin that stood out in the void like a printer's mistake.

He showed me some of his collections. He had few books—Keats, Shelley, Rossetti, William Morris—that was all; he had no prose. Then there were his albums containing prints and reproductions of great paintings. It was no collection in the fastidious sense of the term; there was the same perversity about it as about everything else that belonged to my friend. But certain gems that would be apt to miss the eye of the prosaic collector were preserved here. I shall never forget a few things I saw—some frescoes from an obscure Indian temple, some excellent specimens of Indian landscape, Ruben's Judgment of Paris, a street scene in a South Indian village.

I went over the list with delight. Then a natural question suggested itself to me.

'Well, Mr Gangadhar, excuse me if I am inquisitive, but do you paint yourself?'

'I think I do,' he returned a bit confused, 'though other people don't think the same way. You are welcome to judge for yourself.'

He dived among his drawers and produced some of his own wares. I could see that his hands trembled as he gave them to me—as the hands of the young mother tremble when she presents her first-born to its father to be kissed.

I trembled, in my turn, as I gazed at some of them. They were realistic representations of Indian themes, ancient and modern; and they were done with such startling truth and blindness to convention that the average man would have thrown up his hands at sight of them and cried them down as clandestine. There was a large picture of the Mountain-goddess, Parvati, doing her penance on Mount Kailas that very nearly brought my heart into my mouth; the meagrely clothed damsel, half-girl, half-woman standing out divinely beautiful against a background of grey hills, her hands clasped on her bosom and a strange look of love and devotion in her eyes.

'This is a masterpiece!' I cried enthusiastically as I gazed at the picture, although I am usually credited with almost a stoical sobriety in such things.

'You think so?'

'I do.'

Mr Gangadhar smiled — a sad smile, so it seemed to me.

'Then read this.'

And he fumbled among his files and produced a newspaper-cutting. It was a review that had appeared in connection with an Art Exhibition in the City—conventional, narrow-minded, and black from beginning to end. '*A typical illustration of the Fleshy School of Art . . . outrageous and unhealthy to an obnoxious degree . . . the work of a sordid, obsessed imagination . . .*' the epithets ran in this strain. I perused it silently, then returned it to him. I wanted to say something, but the words stuck in my throat.

'What do you say to that?' my friend asked me with a hollow laugh.

'It's nonsense undistilled.'

'But sense or nonsense,' he returned, at the same time lighting a match and setting fire to the document, 'I don't care a rap for it. These cheap critics are dunderheads. I tell you, they are dunderheads. And their gutter-dirt of inferior comment—I spurn it! I will fight a thousand of their sort. I will show them yet I can paint in spite of their mud-flinging.'

His eyes flashed rebellion; he was in a fighting mood. I knew then that he was a wronged soul; and I knew too that, for once, he was deceiving himself. He didn't care a rap for their criticism, he said; but, in fact, he cared worlds for it. His eyes, his words, every movement and gesture of his frame breathed how much he cared for it. But he failed to acknowledge the fact.

He was silent for a long while.

'The world is a humbug,' he said at last, 'and its chief pastime is to humbug itself. Its ideal life is a life of delusion —a blind escape from the monster Fact. It goes on revelling in an eternal feast of the flesh; but when the artist interprets the curve of a woman's bosom, it pulls its shawl tight and looks outraged. The same is its attitude towards any other subject. Humanity is a pack of liars . . .'

His bitterness was getting the better of him.

3

I called on Mr Gangadhar pretty often. By and by I got accustomed to his aerial habitation; although, whenever I went up the stairs, the landlord gave me a stare and accompanied it with a surly grunt that I could not then understand.

Mr Gangadhar was a strange man. He always harped on Realism, on the monster Fact; but he himself never had any dealings with the monster. At least that was the impression his conversation left on me. Up in his little cabin, we smoked and chatted for hours on end; the wind blew from outside, sometimes acrid, sometimes friendly; somewhere to the right a printing press heaved, groaned, and fell in a perpetual cycle like a mountain in labour; below, vendors, carts, buffaloes, and distress stalked in a noisy pageant; the monster Fact hooted and shrieked in twenty different sharps and flats. But we never cared; the din and the grating died on our ears like the ebbing of a wave heard in the distance. And we bragged all the louder about Art and the Fact.

I never knew nor chose to enquire about anything concerning my friend: who he was, where he came from, what work he did in the City. Perhaps I liked a semblance of mystery, Perhaps the dreaminess of my friend's appearance and demeanour dispelled the little inquisitiveness that was mine. Anyway, the fact was there: I knew nothing more about Mr Gangadhar than his name, his personal peculiarities—and his address.

4

During one of my late-afternoon calls I found him a trifle unwell. He was not in his usual lecturing mood. He was more untidy than ever; his eyes glistened with a feverish light. He talked little that evening, he scarcely stirred from his armchair, but sat with

his head drooping on one side, his legs asprawl on the table and his eyes fixed in a vacant stare at the confusion of his table.

I asked him if anything was the matter.

'Mr Gangadhar lay motionless on his back, his hands lying loose on either side of him.'

'Oh nothing,' he answered with an ineffectual attempt at laughter, 'it's only the blues—what your Kipling calls,

"... Cameelious hump—
The hump that is black and blue."

A pretty piece of poetry, isn't it? Ha! ha!'

There was an early moon that night. The grey light entered the cabin through the window. It had a magical effect on Mr Gangadhar. He seemed to shake off his low spirits and try to be his usual self. He rose from his chair and took me outside.

The view from the terrace was glorious. We looked down on a world of dark, huddled tiles, and trees that trembled in the hesitating breeze. Overhead a clear sky sprinkled with stars, with the half-moon in the middle. A stray cloudlet flitted across it like a torn sail.

'The stars, they mark man's limit,' my friend was saying it half to himself. 'See how they wink, like little sprites. They have winked thus since the beginning of Creation. Perhaps they jeer at humanity, who knows?'

He watched the stars, long and motionless, in a silent ecstasy of joy.

I feared it was getting too late. I put a hand upon his shoulder but as I did so he shuddered and made a painful 'Oh!'

'What's the matter ?'

'Nothing.'

He sat down on the parapet—limp.

5

My next visit was two days afterwards. This time the landlord did not give me his curious look, but collared me at the door and straight came to business. 'Your friend upstairs is rather queer, Sir. I think I shall have to give him notice; he hasn't paid the rent for the last three months.'

I quietened his fears and went upstairs.

Contrary to custom, my friend's door was closed. I knocked, but there was no response. I made another try, this time pushing the door a little when it gave a shriek, a creak, and flew open!

The room was perfectly dark. Only a patch of moonlight lit the floor through the window. I took one or two strides within; then stumbled against something cold . . . .

A horrid fear gripped my heart and cut like a sabre . . . .

An unholy procession of monstrous chemicals skipped across my bewildered eyes.

I switched on the light.

Mr Gangadhar lay motionless on his back, his hands lying loose on either side of him.

Outside the moonlight laughed on the terrace, the stars winked as at the beginning of Creation.

I staggered to the wall, and shrieked like a woman.

He lay motionless on his back.

Like a madman I ran downstairs and raced the streets in search of the doctor.

'The most exciting case that has come under my purview,' the doctor told me as he left my friend's room the next morning. 'But one thing, Mr S—?'

'What?'

'You call yourself his friend, don't you?'

'Do you doubt it?'

'Well, but . . . common sense, you know. You let him collapse from starvation. Starvation for eight days, two hundred hours! Good God! I don't mean to say you are to blame. But odd notions of friendship you must have, you authors and artists—dreamers!'

THE DOLL MAKER

By M. R. M. SUNDARAM

KANDAN was quite different from the rest of the village boys. While others were going through their daily round of work, he was lotus-eating. He would be sitting in all impossible places, and with a distant look in his eyes, would let his fancy roam.

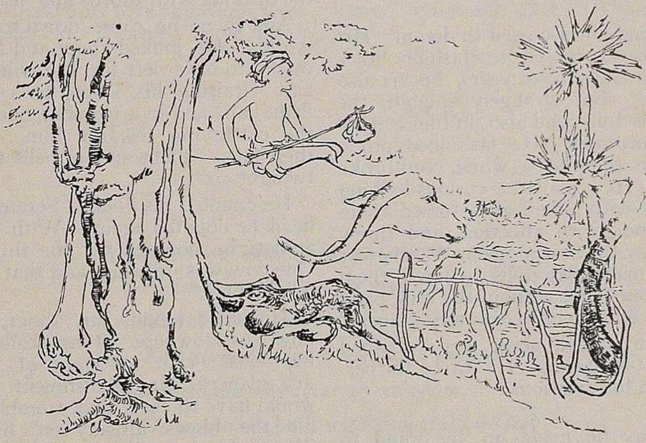
He lost his parents before he could know them, and he was brought up by a maternal aunt of his. Fond of him though she was, she would not shelter him in her cottage for nothing. 'Each morsel of food has to be won with a drop of sweat,' was her principle.

She sent him to a smithy, but the work was not to his liking. It was so dull and dirty. He however liked the golden sparks scintillating from the red-hot piece of iron hammered on the anvil. This poetic admiration of his made him once lose his aim, and the hammer came down on the hand of the blacksmith. And the blacksmith's hand descended on his back in a series of quick rhythmic blows reaching culmination in necking him out.

His aunt fretted and fumed. 'Go to the pen and tend the cows,' said she.

What, to collect the dung in the basket—filth, filth! To sweep the shed—pooh, what did she take him for? And to milk the cows—goodness! Milking meant to rob the calves of their birthright. Impossible. He had a heart full of mercy!

He expressed his abhorrence to these jobs, but when asked to drive the village cattle to pasture, he readily agreed. The work was to his taste. He would live in the open air amidst hills, trees, brooks, and birds. Or he might catch tender *mainas* and make them hop on his palm!



' He would sit majestically on the back of a she-buffalo.'

Early in the morning, he would eat a sumptuous breakfast of cold rice. Then taking a stick in his hand, and an earthen pot containing his midday meal poised at its end, he would sit majestically on the back of a she-buffalo and drive the cattle towards an adjoining meadow. He would allow the animals to graze at their will. 'Poor dears, let them

have their way,' he would cry tenderly.

With a heart expanding with freedom, he would run, jump, and roll on the green grass. When tired he would sit in the shade of a huge banyan tree, making toys.

He brought bamboo reeds and cut wonderful pipes out of them. He pulled down palm-leaves and made out of them, fans, little chairs, elastic snakes, and mewing whistles. He also learnt to shape dolls with clay, and most of his attention was bestowed upon this particular work.

While the cattle were grazing or lying about, he dreamt many dreams and made many dolls. Days went on—years! He grew from a boy to a young man. Even then the play-instinct dwelt in him.

His mind never ceased to dream. His fingers never ceased to fashion toys. With the advance of years, his art also improved. But strangely enough, the creator of dolls had also in him a destructive madness. He fashioned pipes, played on them for a while, and broke them. He plaited curious-looking creatures with palm-leaves, tossed them in his hands with affection, and threw them away the next moment. With great skill he made clay dolls, painted them with colours, and without the least pang of heart, sent them to a watery-grave.

Kandan could never rest satisfied with part-successes. He cared for perfection in his creations.

2

One day he made up his mind to produce a masterpiece that would express his great dreams. He seated himself comfortably in the shade of the accustomed banyantree, with a lump of clay in front of him.

The cows, sheep, and buffaloes were moving about the meadow. The young sun was burning in a cloudless sky. Restless birds were flying from tree to tree, twittering as they flew. The brook near by was gurgling on with sweet monotony.

The sun had ridden up, and it was noon. Kandan was still busy with his work. He worked with zeal. He hurriedly finished his midday meal. A tired cow that was chewing the cud near him watched him with her large eyes.

He again set to work.

The lump of clay had slowly taken shape. At each twist of his fingers a detail was formed—a cow with a calf by its side, a mound behind them, a shepherd boy playing on a pipe, with one leg on the ground and the other on a mound.

The sun went down slowly.

The wood glowed with gold.

Kandan rose up with a yawn—the work was finished. A smile lit his lips. The model was a real masterpiece! He carefully lifted the doll and softly placed it in a hollow of the banyan and covered the opening with thorns and leaves.

And then—he came down to the real world! He looked about and found he ought to have left for the village long ago. Raising his voice, he cried out, 'bah, bah,' and in a moment, one by one, the cattle ran towards him, wagging their tails. The sound of bells filled the twilight air.

He counted his flock. Scratching his head he counted again. With growing anxiety he counted for the third time. One cow was missing and that one, his neighbour's.

He called aloud, ran about, but the cow was nowhere. Tears rolled down his eyes. He thought of the angry glances, the punishment that he would have to face, and trembled. He felt the blows already on his back. Slowly he drove the rest of the cattle to the village.

3

'Doll, a beautiful doll!' cried Kandan along the streets of the nearest town. 'Doll, a beautiful doll!' as though he was a born hawker.

A rich young gentleman hailed him. He examined the doll from different angles and exclaimed in surprise.

'Where did you get this, boy?' asked he.

'I made it myself, Sir!'

'You made it? Sure? Impossible to believe!'

'What a lovely thing!' exclaimed the gentleman's wife, looking over his shoulder.

'What will you have for this?'

'The value of a cow,' replied Kandan.

The gentleman looked at Kandan, at the doll, at his wife, and again at Kandan each in turn, and stepping quietly inside, came out with twenty-five rupees. 'You are an artist,' cried he.

Kandan ran post-haste to his village. 'Here man, take this,' and no more fuss about your lost cow' . . .

A new life opened before Kandan.

Kandan filled his house with leaf-toys and clay-dolls. Every market day he set out for town with his wares, and returned with a heavy purse. He made his appearance at all the festivals in the neighbourhood; his toys and dolls were in great demand. He freely gave away tiny whistles to children and endeared himself to the people.

Catching scent of his inclination, parents with grown-up girls looked at him for favour. Kandan could not walk the streets of the village without being concious of a pretty pair of eyes peering at him through the doorway of each house.

Of all the girls in the village, he liked only one. That was Mâlai. While passing, he smiled at her sweetly, and she smiled back and understood. After they were married, one day, Kandan took a strange fancy. He asked Mâlai to pose for a doll. Within an hour the work was finished. He declared it to be his best doll. It was placed in a prominent niche of the house. Of course that doll was not for sale!

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Leads't thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

KEATS.

ILLUSION

By SCHWARTZ PONRATNAM.

HOT days followed as cold days flew; the nights were sultry and the noons trying. On one such day, in the afternoon, a discussion started in one of the rooms of our hostel. Some students were trying to prove the existence of devils in this world, with examples from various books, while others brought up arguments against it.

Attracted by the loud, interesting discussion, students began drifting in from the other rooms and telling what they had heard or experienced about ghosts. While one was describing a devil in the form of a giant, another dwelt upon the death of a certain person possessed by an evil spirit; others spoke of crimson plumes of fire they had seen at the dead of night. As the discussion warmed up, and as the impression of some incidents related were so overpowering, certain things they had considered for long as the very white of truth, proved to be wholesome lies. There were many champions for both sides of the argument, but eventually the majority voted for No Devils on Earth.

That day, I could eat but little, and I thought it was due to the intensity of the heat.

The gong sounded. My knell I thought! The Devil would follow me soon! The first period was the most disagreeable to me and I felt greatly relieved when the hour came to an end. The next hour was devoted to general reading; everyone was expected to take a book from the College library and read silently.

Unseen by the lecturer, I took a back bench that day, where I could not directly be noticed by him. I turned page after page of the book, but could make nothing out of them, for my eyes alone went along those lines, not my mind. I might have been all the while meditating on something beyond my control. Slowly I pillowed my head on the desk. I became aware of an uneasy feeling; my eyes closed; and my mind was drifting, drifting into a world of strange shadows and stranger shapes.

When I awoke I found myself shut up all alone in the College. It was already sundown, and only a faint light was to be seen around me in the hall. As I thought of my lone situation, of phantoms that were supposed to haunt the building, my heart beat loudly, and a cold sweat began to gather about my brow. Abruptly I stood up, and looking round to see whether any spectre was beside me, I ran across the hall. Terrified I hurried from room to room, searching for possible means of escape, but no way was open.

I was startled by the slightest noise. Did the walls move? did the benches and bureaus creak? I looked at every dark corner with dark apprehension.

There was a full moon. It stole through the windows, and carpeted the floor here and there with its shining patches. I went to an open window and pressing my forehead close against the cold iron bars gazed at the moon, at the moonlit prospect before me, when suddenly I thought I heard a noise, and turning quickly round, beheld a nebulous object moving slowly towards me.

Despair animated me to instant action. Unhooking my knife from the belt, and opening it, I advanced towards the Shape slowly.

Just when I was half-way across the room, an owl from a tree near by began ominously: Tu — whit! — Tu — whoo! Tu — whit!—Tu — whoo! My blood went cold and my heart stopped beating. I was terrified once again. I made the sign of the cross and advanced with steady steps; the glowing live-coal eyes of the spectre facinated me into a kind of fearful pleasure. I neared it

and lifting the knife high above my head thrust at it three or four times kicking it violently the while. Followed a rattle and a crash ; I fell limp on the floor knocking the water-tub with me. Something sharp and curved cut my elbow (I found it later to be the steel rim of the tub); there came the warm scent of blood tumbling in beads—everything afterwards was a perfect blank.

In the small hours of the morning I woke up. I felt refreshed by the cool wind of the budding dawn. For upwards an hour I might have sat thinking of my experience overnight when I heard the tinkling sound of keys outside the main door. I hid myself under a bench so as not to be seen by the sweeper who entered, and as he went into the adjacent room, I made my escape.

Later in the morning I met the prefect of the hostel.

'Ho! Thomas,' cried he. 'Well met! Where were you last night ?'

'I've no mind to tell you,' I replied.

'No mind to tell me. Queer indeed! Aha! Been to your father-in-law's ?'

'Yes, of course,' I said, thinking how glad my young wife would have been to welcome me.

'Did you get permission to go out ?'

'Why, why should I ? Oh, I only meant how could I ? It was a quick decision to go. Don't you understand ?'

'Quick decision, eh ? But what *was* the matter ? Do tell me; I won't tell the principal about your absence if only you tell me the truth. Only a few know you were absent last night.'

'I'm not prepared to tell you.' But after a moment of consideration : 'Oh, I can't. It's such a thing. I can't.'

'Wait then for the consequences!'

'Do as you please.'

'Think again!'

'Go your way, man! I'll speak to the principal.'

'Thomas,' said the principal, 'what's this I hear ? You have often been complained against, both by your sub-warden and prefect. It is reported that last night you were absent from the hostel. The prefect says that yesterday night at 9 o'clock he saw you entering your uncle's house.'

'No sir, I — I —,' I began pathetically.

'Stop that nonsense. You are suspended from attending college for one week for repeated misconduct and during this period you are on no account to enter the hostel premises. Go.'

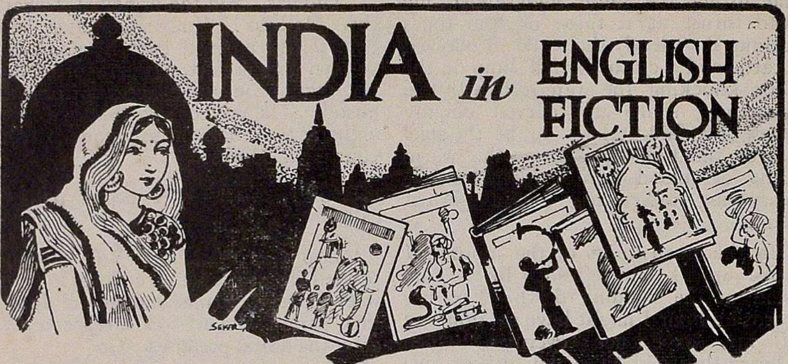
'You should consider both sides of the question, Sir,' I broke out hastily.

'Take yourself off!'

That evening I went out. It was a solitary walk. The scene around was entrancing. A hill rose green in the distance ; on its summit shone pure and white the outer walls of a temple. Some yards away in the slope, black boulders of rock stood frowning. Yet farther off spread a thick growth of prickly pear, in sharp crowns and broad pennons.

Just then a thought came. Soon the shadows of evening would overtake this lovely view, and the objects of beauty would assume fearful aspects. The imagination of the uninitiated would transform the prickly pear into little demon shapes and the rocks at the distance to monstrous giants. The dawn of the moon would change the aspect ; dark demons would seem pale spectres. Yes, but if man only walks towards these objects, fear would hold him no more. And what of the devils who live with you and move with you all day, professing eternal friendship and whose presence heartens you ? I mean men. They are outwardly angels, but inwardly, ravening like wolves to find means of injuring their neighbours. Whom then should we fear ?

Surely, surely, these devils of the inner shrine.



'One of the charms of the East to men of the West is its strangeness, its so-called incomprehensibility, which really only means its different way of doing the same things, and the feeling of superiority it gives to dwellers in the West to say to themselves that after all, they prefer their own ways of doing. Certainly one of the charms of the West for the men of the East is the same difference and the corresponding feeling of superiority dwellers of the East have when they view the new-ness, the rawness, the ebullient youthfulness of the West, which is so distasteful to them. Thus both are secretly satisfied, and I, for one, would never have the East and West other than remote from each other, else one of the spices of life in a world already dull enough would be gone. There is nothing like a good healthy feeling of superiority to one's fellows to produce joy in living.'–Mrs Pearl S. Buck.

While expressing his enthusiasm and delight for some of the jungle books and novels of Rudyard Kipling, the late Mr Frank Harris remarked that he got more of the soul of India from the native writers. 'Kipling,' Mr Harris wrote, 'always assumed that the English rule was the best thing that had happened to India: the *Pax Britannica* held to peace a score of warring races and conflicting religions. To ask him whether it had not resulted in the enslavement and impoverishment of millions of the poorest was to excite surprise. He had never considered that side of the matter: The English had given railways to India was the sufficient answer.'

With a greater sympathy, more intimacy of touch and gentler assurance than Kipling ever achieved, Mr Denis Kincaid treats of India in his *Cactus Land*,* a novel in which, though the incidents are put together without any regular symmetry, is a theme, beautiful for its true tragic quality. Here are no blustering captains, no volcanic commanders; no sleuths of the C. I. D., no Tantia Topis; no plots against the Government, no banner to fly. The story interest is pure and pre-eminent. The one significant English character is Ginger, the kiltie, who picks up Rita in Herbert's Bar, Bombay. And the world is rich for this picking up; it has Kittijan. Kitti is adopted by a dancing girl, Bali by name, in the City; 'she takes the oldest profession as a duck to water,' and runs off with Insau, a handsome Punjabi sepoy. She is happy for a time, then

*Chatto and Windus, 7s. 6d.

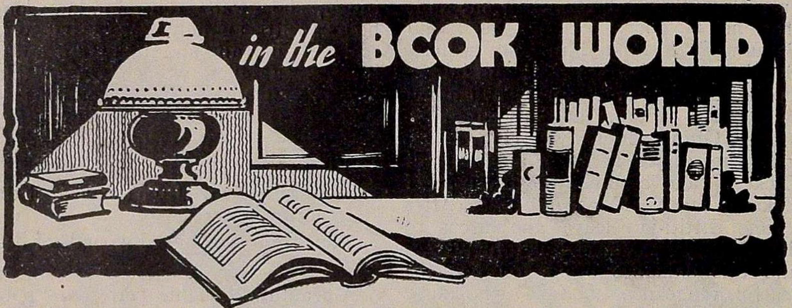
quarrels with her lover when she finds that he is poor, sets up his friend Sabuktagin against him and seduces Sabuktagin. She flies again and joins a circus run by a respectable Englishman (with the "captain" and Mrs Ironside of the Grand Circus we seem to pass into the atmosphere of a novel of Dickens), and becomes the favourite of Zaka, a fanatical Moslem priest. After a time Kittiti-jan leaves the circus to dally with Pir, a sensual, slothful fellow; and this dalliance brings on her the fearful vengeance of Zaka who mutilates her face.

And as the story begins in Herbert's Bar, Bombay, so it ends there. Ginger, the kiltie, now the rotund, rubicund steward of a European Club, is seen sipping his drink and chatting with a half-drunken sailor. Soon the sailor lurches out; a taxi picks him up and drops him at a mean hovel. 'God, what 'ave you been doing to yourself?' he asks as he draws the saree from a woman's face. With strange thoughts and on unsteady legs he leaves her; the woman after covering her nose and mouth with her saree, sits at the door awaiting a new customer. Poor Kitti-jan! plunged in poverty-stricken prostitution, she awaits thus, for long, long hours—Kitti, an ugly wreck, but very real, very human, and in a strange way lovable, as fallen women are lovable. She may inspire such a verse as this, *The Cactus*, by Lawrence Hope:

> 'The scarlet flower with never a sister leaf,
> Stemless, springs from the edge of the cactus-thorn:
> Thus from the ragged wounds of desperate grief
> A beautiful thought, perfect and pure, is born.'

Kitti-jan is a scarlet flower and her ragged wounds give her a kind of mystic beauty. Mr Kincaid has drawn her character with much charm and sympathy; and apart from the skilful delineation of characters he has told a moving story interspersed with brilliant pieces of descriptive prose; for instance, Kitti's flight and journey with the pilgrims to the shrine of Hashim, and the fight between a wild boar and a pack of hounds. Technically, though *Cactus Land* falls short of the best, it has force and distinction and I beg to recommend it to Indians and all lovers of India.

M. S. I.



INDO-ENGLISH

Rose Clarendon; or, The Trials of True Love, by A Young Indian Author (G. Bell, London, 5s.)

ROSE CLARENDON is unadulterated melodrama, and though the time of the story is the present it belongs to a more romantic age than ours. The chief quality of the book is its all-pervading amateurishness; the style is florid and there is a constant striving after effect.

An example of the author's narrative prose:

'She took his hand in her own and leaned on his arm; thus, exchanging glances of a passionate love, hugging and kissing, they passed to the perfect bliss of their wedded life.'

Of dialogue:

'What's the meaning of all this?' he ejaculates angrily.

'This!' hisses Gobind, brandishing the knife over his head. Hiranand shrinks back in terror and alarm. 'What do you want?' 'A written apology for having maligned my character,' is the grim response.

'But who are you? What have I done to you? By heaven!' he ejaculates suddenly, 'tis Gobindram!'

The characters in the book are either very wicked or very virtuous, in sheen as are the roses on the cover and the ivy round the chapter headings.

An exquisitely got-up book that makes its readers juveniles, and timid of vital things and vital thoughts.

M. S. KRISHNAN

ENGLISH

Defy the Foul Fiend, by John Collier (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.)

The Darkening Green, by Compton Mackenzie (Cassel, 7s. 6d.)

A Young Man in a Hurry, & Other Stories, by T. O. Beachcroft (Boriswood, 7s. 6d.)

Pelican Walking, by G. B. Stern (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.)

The Cat Jumps, by Elizabeth Bowen (Gollancz, *7s. 6d.*)

Bombay Mail, by Lawrence G. Blochman (Collins [The Crime Club], 7s. 6d.)

WILLOUGHBY CARBO, the illegitimate son of a dissolute and bankrupt peer, Lord Ollebeare, by his cook, has spent his life, up to the age of twenty, among the servants of an uncle; and as a young man he has only a very elementary education. This evidences itself when at twenty-one, meeting his father by chance, he goes to Lord Stumber to get a private secretaryship in Belgrave Square with a hundred and fifty a year:

'Eton?' his employer asks him the monosyllabic question.

'Yes, thanks,' he replies, 'I had lunch before I got the train.'

Not knowing how to admire Lady Stumber, who is a type of woman made for under-secretaries to admire, and

failing to interpret her kindness with due detachment. Willoughby soon finds himself in the streets with a month's salary in his pocket. This is his first serious floundering on entering a career; he sees his mistakes and in trying to rectify them flounders still further. He suffers in many ways and makes others suffer — more than anybody, his two uncles. After a series of misadventures, he comes back eventually, with a wife to the family place at Ollebeare and settles down. His attitude to life expresses itself in his talk with Mr Langton: 'Even a really noble job like a doctor's, or a sound job like a farmer's, seems to me only to be a staving off of the final crash, which I personally hope will come. I could work for that, or I can continue just studying books and art and life, and go out in the fields in springtime, or to Kew, and go to the Mediterranean perhaps, and try to be one of those people who may preserve the seeds of beauty through the deluge.

Defy the Foul Fiend is a witty and brilliant book and is worthy of the author of *His Monkey Wife*. Here is no sentimentalism, no shallow pretence; Mr Collier is throughout forcible and unsparing in manner. But the manner is sometimes too much and the story suffers from being subordinate to it.

From Mr Collier's world of wit and gay irresponsibility it is pleasant to ramble on to the rolling countryside of Mr Compton Mackenzie's. *The Darkening Green* with its poetic setting and good love story is very delectable reading; life in an English countryside forty years ago is a theme best suited to Mr Mackenzie's style, and when it is a reminiscence of the days when he was a sprightly schoolboy of fourteen it has an added charm and interest; surely, things in such a world always maintain a starry harmony and equillibrium.

I have read many of the stories gathered in *A Young Man in a Hurry* in the pages of *The London Mercury*. Mr Beachcroft is a fine craftsman; he depicts the life of the lower middle class with a sympathetic and disciplined mind. But often his plots are crude, in painful contrast to his beguiling narrative method; he toys with coincidence and cheapens irony and injures the artistic sense he is so rich in.

Compared with Mr Beachcroft's stories Miss Stern's are lighter reading and provide better entertainment. She has a richly fibred mind and even at her worst she is incapable of boring anyone. Her knowledge of the world is characterised by humour and high charity and in that knowledge her characters live. The author of the *Sanctuary* can be sure of her immortality with *Pelican Walking*; of the fourteen stories in this volume some are very good, none really bad; and while "What is Become of Waring" is the most amusing, "Nectarine Life" is the most artistic.

Very different from Miss Stern, as a craftswoman, is Miss Bowen; there is more of artfulness than artistry in her stories, and in the method she has made her own Miss Bowen remains most original. She has a very alert mind, quick to grasp and quicker to express; she is so splendidly Shylocky with her words that she is able to achieve an amazing precision in her details and betray character in a word or in a sentence: 'The Angelus came sweetly across the lake, but Dagmar, sitting out on her loggia, frowned at a tulip-tree in extravagant blossom. She was beautiful (arms, neck of supple ivory; her pale hair, brushed you would think, with a gold-powdered brush, petal-curled at the nape), but that does not keep a girl going for ever.' But Miss Bowen's emotions are often foamy; she doesn't stabilise her colours, and makes up for it by depicting the gruesome. *The Cat Jumps* impresses one pre-eminently by its cleverness and sophistry.

I am not a thriller-fan but once in a way I don't mind getting thrilled. Murders on trains, in ships, and in hotels or anywhere beneath the sun have raised a bumper crop of mystery-books, and the elucidation of the mystery is done according to the mathematical or the romantic turn of mind of the author.

Most of the elucidation is laborious and boring. Mr Blochman's method of treatment is fresh ; but is it with a mischievous pleasure in deceiving the reader that he throws in an early clue as to who will murder Sir Anthony Daniels, *Bt*, C. B. E., K. S. I ? The murder of the knight (we like to remind Mr Blochman that there is no such order of knighthood as K. S. I.) is done on the Mail between Calcutta and Bombay ; the murderer must be on the train, there is no communication between the coaches, and Inspector Prike must find out the murderer before the train reaches Bombay. The story moves in speed with the terrific speed of the train ; the atmosphere is wrapped in a haze of white heat. Mr Blochman has screened the identity of Secret Agent F. 691 very thickly ; a photographer, a plumber, and a physician mix their interesting colours in this capital mystery story.

MANJERI S. ISVARAN

Is there aught you need that my hands withhold,
Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?
Lo! I have flung to the East and West
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.

Gathered like pearls in their alien graves
Silent they sleep by the Persian waves,
Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.

Can ye measure the grief of the tears I weep
Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?

SAROJINI NAIDU.